Improving Careers Education
An analysis of recent research and inspection findings

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Introduction

The report which forms the basis of this article was written for the national support programme for careers education. In November 2001, the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) contracted VT Careers Management and the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers (NACGT) to provide a national support programme for staff in schools and colleges involved in careers education and those who support them.

The report considers schools and colleges separately. This reflects the different approaches to careers education of these two sectors. Important issues relating to special schools are discussed within the section of the report dealing with schools. There have been fewer studies of careers education in special schools and colleges.

The research findings for both schools and colleges are discussed in relation to the following key themes which have a bearing on effectiveness and improvement in careers education:

* policy initiatives
* working with partners
* school/college-wide leadership and management
* curriculum provision and development
* evaluation, inspection and quality standards
* training and professional development

The relationship of careers education to careers education and guidance

The emphasis in this report is on 'careers education' for 11-19 year olds. It is helpful to define careers education and its relationship to the other main components of careers education and guidance.

'Careers education and guidance' is the recognised term for the combination of curriculum-focused and guidance-focused processes and activities which enable young people to construct and manage their careers. It is concerned with helping young people to make progress in learning and work and to make sense of their experience of career. It also seeks to build on the informal and incidental careers education and guidance which takes place outside school and college.

Specifically, careers education and guidance helps young people to:

* understand themselves and the influences on them;
* investigate opportunities in learning and work;
* show initiative and enterprise;
* present themselves to others;
* make use of guidance;
* make career plans;
* make decisions;
* manage change and transition.

For practical purposes, it is convenient to identify three interrelated components of careers education and guidance: careers education, careers information and careers guidance. 'Careers education' refers to teaching and learning activities, usually provided in a group setting, which facilitate the career learning and development of young people. 'Careers information' refers to activities requiring information skills, usually provided in a careers library, and involving access to a wide range of resources (including people) and different media (including ICT) which improve the career knowledge of young people. 'Careers guidance' refers to guidance activities (e.g. advising and counselling) usually offered on a one-to-one or small group basis, which enable individuals to apply their career learning and development to the construction and management of their own careers. The effectiveness of careers education and guidance is linked to how well these three components are combined.

SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS
Policy initiatives

Policy is a major external influence on the purpose and scope of careers education and guidance in schools and colleges. It can be an important lever for change setting the agenda and driving developments through the provision of resources. However, the effects of policy are not clear-cut. Professionals change reforms as much as reforms change professionals. Ofsted (1998a&b) found that the impact of government initiatives was higher in mainstream secondary schools than in special schools. Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were least likely to have benefited from policy initiatives.

The aims of careers education and guidance policy in the late 1990s were to raise the status and profile of careers education and guidance, promote good practice and fund

training for staff and careers information resources (DfEE, 1997a). The high profile of careers education and guidance at this time was linked to its perceived role in supporting the wider economic policy agenda. It was argued that better careers education and guidance would prepare young people for lifelong learning and employability and help them develop the skills needed for the UK to compete successfully in the global economy. It was also argued that careers education and guidance would improve the matching of people to learning and work opportunities thereby reducing course switching, failure and drop-out which were a drain on the public purse. These arguments continue to influence the policy debate on the role of careers education and guidance.

In contrast to the economic arguments for better careers education and guidance, the *Excellence in Schools* White Paper (1997) suggested, for the first time, that aspects of careers education and guidance had a role in promoting higher educational standards and more effective schools. The institutional argument was subsequently investigated by NFER for the DfEE (Morris *et al.* 2000) and the Department followed this up by publishing *School Improvement: How careers work can help* (2000b). Nevertheless, the impact of this policy thrust has remained relatively low key.

1997-98 was a turning point in the formulation of policy arguments for careers education and guidance combining the 'social justice' argument with the 'economic' case. Careers education and guidance was given a role in combating social exclusion. The first manifestation of this policy was the so-called focusing agenda in which careers services were asked to target their help on those who needed it most. This meant significant shifts in the deployment of careers service resources to education, with gains for some schools but losses for others. A study for the DfES found that schools lacked capacity to compensate for the re-direction of careers service resources (Morris et al., 2001). This report also suggested that the gap was widening between schools with good careers programmes and those where provision was poor. Similarly, the QPID review of the effects of focusing (2001) found that few schools had made substantial reviews of their own arrangements in order to compensate for reduced allocations by careers services. This was also linked to schools' difficulties in responding to rapid and continuous change and a lack of clarity about the role and the desired outcomes of careers work. The careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.* 2000) also found confusion about the role and priorities of the careers service.

The current policy context for careers education and guidance in England is linked to the implementation of Connexions, a national strategy for improving participation and raising achievement in education and training by tackling obstacles to educational and social inclusion. Connexions is a universal and inclusive but differentiated service, offering and co-ordinating support for young people in all aspects of their personal, social, educational and career development. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of Connexions on careers education in schools, although evidence will emerge from Ofsted inspections of Connexions Partnerships. Two studies early in the history of Connexions provide limited evidence of the impact of Connexions. The NERU project (2001) found that there was general support for the 'philosophy' of Connexions but much confusion, uncertainty and anxiety among institutions, particularly in relation to how the career development needs of the majority of young people will be met if heavy targeting is introduced. The NFER study (Morris *et al.*, 2001) confirmed this view and articulated the concern that the 1998 focusing agenda had diminished the status of careers education and guidance by associating it with problem students. Both studies were sceptical of the assumption that ICT-based solutions could meet the needs of the majority of young people and provide a satisfactory baseline service.

The most recent policy initiative is the consultation document for the *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* Green Paper (DfES, 2002a). It suggests that careers education and guidance has a significant role in the provision of advice, guidance and support for young people. It aims to ensure that young people have access to impartial and independent help in formulating and maintaining an individual learning plan and are well-prepared for making relevant and appropriate choices. This initiative represents an important re-statement of the principle of meeting individual guidance needs through the provision of independent and impartial help.

Careers professionals and practitioners argue that careers education and guidance is frequently 'squeezed' by competing policy priorities such as the emphasis on standards as measured by examinations and assessment and the introduction of citizenship as a national curriculum subject. They also voice concerns that some of the policy objectives for careers education and guidance are unrealistic and inappropriate in relation to staffing, curriculum and timetable constraints in many schools. Further, careers education and guidance may be able to ameliorate the effects of social exclusion, but is unlikely to reach the roots of social exclusion which lie in the structural bases of economic and social disadvantage.

Working with partners

The English system is sometimes characterised as one in which schools provide a firm base of careers education while careers services (and existing Connexions services) provide careers guidance. This is an over-simplification of what happens in practice. The careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.* 2000) found that careers information was viewed as a joint responsibility, careers-related skill development was seen as a joint responsibility in some two-thirds of cases, and careers guidance was still held to be largely the role of the careers adviser with some school support.

Most surveys and inspection reports show that the relationship between schools, including special schools, and careers services is purposeful and reasonably effective. Ofsted (1998b) reported that sometimes careers advisers have insufficient specialist expertise and understanding for working with students with special educational needs. The NFER study on the delivery of careers education and guidance in schools (Morris *et al.*, 2001) reported that over half of senior careers service managers felt that the focusing agenda had led to strained relationships with schools and significant difficulties in maintaining the profile of careers education and guidance. The QPID review (2001) similarly reported difficulties arising from a reduction of resources allocated to work in education of 15-25% between 1998-2000, with larger reductions in post-16 work. They found that careers advisers in many schools were under considerable pressure to provide a level of service that exceeded the time allocated by their managers.

The QPID review (2001) also highlighted shortcomings in the way that changes in careers service priorities were communicated to schools. This too has implications for the implementation of Connexions.

This review also noted that careers services were finding it difficult to establish a leading, local role in the assessment and development of careers education and guidance. They found it easier to work in partnership with committed schools which were interested in improving the qualifications of careers staff, achieving the local quality award and taking part in new projects. Careers services lacked leverage to encourage schools to give sufficient priority to careers education and guidance, although some careers services endeavoured to use partnership agreement negotiations for this purpose. The QPID review noted that individual careers advisers lacked confidence and skills in taking on a curriculum consultancy role; and the careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.* 2000) commented that it was still rare for careers advisers to be viewed as curriculum consultants other than in an informal sense as the careers co-ordinator's critical friend. However, some careers and Connexions services have appointed staff to become careers education and guidance specialists. The study recommended that these services should develop organisational practices that ensure more effective links between these specialists and individual careers/personal advisers working in schools. They also recommended that the DfES should agree ways to ensure that Connexions partnerships provide consistent support for the development of careers education. The issue is further complicated by the need to harness the contributions of other agencies such as education-business link organisations and strategic bodies such as local education authorities and learning and skills councils.

Several research projects refer to the need for effective home-school links in relation to careers education. Morris *et al.* (2000) found mixed practice but concluded that links with parents and carers were generally underdeveloped. Ofsted (1998b) noted that special schools have good arrangements for liaising with, and involving parents in, career and transition planning. Semple (1994) highlighted the role of careers education and guidance in informing and updating parents and carers on changing opportunities and qualifications, but also in enabling them to hold careers-related conversations with their children. The NERU project (1999) noted that information relevant to the whole year group is communicated to parents but there is a lack of individualised communication. Ofsted (1998a) observed that schools make insufficient use of parents to help other people's children.

School-wide leadership and management

Most reports make the link between senior management support and the effectiveness of careers education and guidance (DfEE, 1998c; Morris *et al.*, 1999b; Morris *et al.*, 2000; Morris *et al.*, 2001). One of these studies (Morris *et al.* 1999b) suggested that senior management support for careers education and guidance has become increasingly overt. The survey by Morris *et al.* (2001) found that good structural support for careers education was evident in just under one-third of the schools in the study while the remaining schools displayed some major deficits in leadership and management capacity. Ofsted (1998b) reported that leadership and management was at least sound in eight out of ten special schools and good in over half.

The careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris et al., 2000) identified four distinctive roles for careers education and guidance which could persuade senior managers to pay it more attention. It could be seen as:
* an agent of curriculum and organisational change;
* a means of enhancing student self-esteem or motivation;
* a means of promoting lifelong learning and of reducing switching or drop-out; and
* a means of creating curriculum relevance.

The study also identified six key indicators of high status careers education and guidance:
* the seniority of the careers co-ordinator;
* the seniority of the staff teaching careers education and guidance;
* the extent of staff training;
* the allocation of administrative support;
* the allocation of protected time; and
* the extent of curriculum linkage and support (including accreditation for careers education and guidance).

This study also showed that some senior managers failed to involve careers advisers fully in the life of the school. Careers work was most effective when it was pro-actively managed, well-planned and connected with the wider curriculum in the school. Careers work was least effective

when senior management commitment was low, planning was poor and careers work was poorly integrated in the curriculum.

Another facet of effective practice highlighted by the Morris *et al.* study (2001) was the crucial importance of internal networking. They found evidence of effective networking with curriculum review and pastoral groups by careers co-ordinators or their line managers in nearly two-thirds of schools; but the study concluded that few schools were ready to implement Connexions. Most schools either lacked an integrated support system or were failing to make sufficient links between careers education and guidance and the wider curriculum including work-related learning, citizenship, key skills and PSHE.

The study of 30 schools carried out by Morris *et al.* for the DfEE (2000) provides a number of pointers as to how careers education and guidance should be managed at the school level in order to optimise its contribution to school effectiveness and improvement. The report concluded that there was no universal formula for achieving this benefit. School effectiveness was linked to multiple strategies rather than a single strategy such as better careers work. Nevertheless, there were discernible associations between effective careers education and guidance and some indicators of effective performance. The study found it easier to detect an influence on curriculum management, the enrichment of the wider curriculum and student transitions than on attainment and attendance.

The authors found that the impact of careers education and guidance on school effectiveness was most evident in eight out of the 11 most effective schools that had adopted a partnership or guidance community approach. They identified the key elements of a guidance community approach as the existence of enabling structures (e.g. to permit internal networking), senior management support and complementary working between careers professionals. Additional elements included the extent to which external partners such as business and community partners were able to contribute effectively to both careers education and guidance and the wider school curriculum. The harnessing of careers education and guidance by schools was most effective where there was a clear vision of its role and purpose shared by staff, clear and achievable aims and objectives, a firm grounding in 'information' (with links being made between target-setting, performance data and destinations data) and an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system.

The careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.*, 2000) also reviewed the role of the careers co-ordinator. They found that the careers co-ordinator is central to the way in which senior management support for careers education and guidance is marketed and promoted within the school. Most co-ordinators were still the conduit for information flows between the careers service, the school and individuals. Over two-thirds fulfilled the roles of networker (e.g. liaising with staff over the delivery of the programme) and curriculum developer.

It is still the case, however, that few co-ordinators have the brief for post-16 provision and few are 'leading professionals' actively involved in delivery. These findings have implications for how careers education and guidance is promoted, the design of training programmes for careers staff and the future development of the co-ordinator role.

Curriculum provision and development

The concept of a careers programme and the terms used to provide careers help are not always well understood by young people. *Talking about 'Careers' - Young people's views of careers education and guidance at school* (DfEE, 1998a) challenges professionals' perspective on careers education and guidance. Group discussions with 226 students in Years 11 and 12 revealed that few understood what a careers programme was or the respective roles of teachers, careers co-ordinators and careers advisers. This suggested that a re-think may be needed in the way that careers education and guidance is provided and developed in the curriculum.

Careers education

Several studies report that the most frequently encountered delivery pattern for Key Stages 3 and 4 in around 70-80% of schools is careers activities as part of personal, social and health education (PSHE) or its equivalent (Ofsted, 1998; NACGT, 1999; Morris *et al.*, 2001; NERU, 2001). Other forms of provision include suspended or 'block' timetable events, careers as a separate subject and careers teaching within subjects (cross-curricular careers work). The NERU study reported that the careers programme appeared to be most effective and coherent in schools which combined delivery through PSHE with suspended or 'block' timetable events. However, another study (DfEE, 1998a) found that careers work was perceived as a low status activity tainted by its association with PSHE. Morris *et al* (2000) reported that only one-third of the schools with effective provision had strategies to facilitate appropriate input into subject areas. Morris *et al.* (2001) reported that 95% of schools made some careers provision at Key Stages 3 and 4, and just under 90% of schools with sixth forms made similar provision post 16, mainly through the tutorial programme.

The same study found that the quality of learning in careers education and guidance was also affected by the annual amount of curriculum time for careers work which could vary considerably. In Years 10 and 11, for example, one per cent of schools allocated one session a year while four per cent allocated one or two session per week. The average figures were just under 10 hours for Year 9, 14-15 hours for Year 10 and 13-14 hours for Year 11. According to the careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.*, 2000), there is a trend to shift the focus of activity from Year 11 to Year 10. 14-19 developments could

lead to a further shift with a need for significant inputs in Year 9 and some inputs in Years 7 and 8. Ofsted (1998a) found that young people were engaging earlier than ever in career development planning.

The length of careers sessions also has a bearing on the effectiveness of the careers programme. Short sessions such as 10-minute tutorials were generally held to be ineffective (Morris *et al.,*2001). A survey by Ofsted (1998a) also showed that carousel arrangements could exacerbate low standards when students do not receive careers inputs at the right time. It is likely that carousel systems also depress standards where students swap teachers after a short time and there is no continuity of learning, assessment and support.

Consultation by the DfEE (1997) established that schools welcomed non-statutory guidance on careers education but wished to decide for themselves the content and the allocation of time. However, a number of reports provide useful pointers as to how the content of careers programmes needs to change in order to better prepare young people for the world of work and employability. Davies (2002), for example, surveyed young people and business and invited responses from a range of organisations. His research showed that young people were aware of the need to be more entrepreneurial in their careers but felt they lacked the skills and confidence to do so. He recommended that some of the time currently devoted to work-related learning, equivalent to five days in the course of a young person's school career, could be refocused to promote 'enterprise capability'.

DfES support for *The Real Game* has had a major impact on Key Stage 3 careers programmes, especially in Year 8. Over 10,000 packs have been produced and other 'games' in the *Real Game* series including *Make It Real* (for students in Years 6-7), *Be Real* (for Years 9-11) and *Get Real* (for post-16) are being promoted in the UK.

Several studies refer to the challenge of providing appropriate differentiation. The NERU project, for example, found that careers education was provided relatively uniformly by year group with some fine tuning for those not progressing into FE or HE. Some schools in the careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.,* 2000) claimed that differentiation was not an issue while others had made some specific attempts to differentiate their careers provision. Broader strategies for differentiation were not particularly evident and some needs, especially for targeted information, were not being met. Better use of independent learning approaches, incorporating greater use of ICT, and more flexible grouping strategies could be central to timing elements so that they fit in better with students' developing needs.

A number of studies have tried with varying degrees of methodological success to measure the impact of careers programmes on learning outcomes for students. Two studies by the NFER for the DfEE (Morris *et al.,* 1999a; Morris *et*

al. 1999b.) found that appropriate careers education and guidance provision had an impact on young people's overall opportunity awareness, research skills and transition skills. The earlier skill building started, the greater the benefit to the young person. The most ambitious study was the SWA Consulting report on the influence of careers education and guidance on pupils in Year 11 (DfEE, 1998c). The research included an analysis of baseline and final questionnaires completed by 603 students in the East Midlands. The report found that only one in seven students received an acceptable level of careers education and guidance inputs which may explain why students appear to show little progress in career-related learning in Year 11. The report suggested that students may have already reached a high level of learning outcomes before the start of Year 11. On the basis of self-reported outcomes, students already appear to have achieved a high level of outcomes with some progress registered during Year 11 in their opportunity awareness, decision-making and decidedness. It also appeared that there was a stronger association between end of Year 11 outcomes and background factors (e.g. academic attainment and school characteristics) rather than careers education and guidance inputs. The report also found an association between the extent of integration of careers education and guidance in the curriculum and progress achieved, but concluded that the integration of careers education and guidance is at a less than acceptable level for most students. An NFER study for the DfEE (1998a) similarly identified the need for more coherent, better organised, continuous and integrated careers programmes. Two other NFER publications - *Staying On* and *Leaving at 16* (1998) - emphasised the need for more and better careers education and guidance on all the options available to young people at the end of compulsory education.

The publication of *Learning Outcomes from Careers Education and Guidance* (QCA, 1999), generated interest in demonstrating the impact of careers education and guidance on young people's career-related learning. Morris *et al.* (2000) found that only four out of the 30 schools they studied were using or moving towards an outcomes-based approach. Further guidance is still needed to promote more effective practice in relation to learning outcomes. There is also a need for further research to identify key learning outcomes in careers education and guidance and how best to optimise individual learning.

NFER (DfEE, 1998a) revealed the preferences of students in Years 11 and 12 for active and practical careers activities over information-giving in large classes. Students disliked disclosing personal information in front of others and failed to see the link between self-awareness activities and making career choices. They were also dissatisfied with computer printouts which offered strange job suggestions. While they valued comprehensive careers information, they expressed their concerns about limited and biased information on post-16 options, restricted access to IT-based information and poorly-presented written material. Students wanted and

valued more and longer work experience placements, open days and careers conventions, and contact with knowledgeable and experienced adults. These findings have implications for the design of careers programmes in schools.

Ofsted (1998b) found that in many special schools and PRUs that the careers education and guidance programme was insufficient, inappropriate and lacking in breadth. Although the progress made by students was generally sound and, in a few cases, it was very good, Ofsted noted that assessment of progress was not well developed. Students often had unrealistic aspirations and limited career skills. They reported that work experience was often a strength of special school provision for careers education and guidance.

Some schools and national bodies are still unclear about the scope and value of careers education and guidance and its relationship to other areas of the curriculum such as PSHE and Citizenship (DfES, 2000a) and work-related learning (DfES, 2002c). A number of schools still view work experience and work-related activities as separate from careers education and guidance (Morris *et al.*, 2000). The IES/ER study of pre-16 work experience in England (Hillage *et al.*, 2001) was positive about the impact of work experience on some aspects of students' learning related to careers education and guidance. Teachers felt that work experience promoted students' personal and social development, enhanced their maturity and helped them to develop an understanding of the world of work. Fewer saw impacts in terms of broadening students' career horizons which reflects a long-standing concern that work experience sometimes reinforces rather than challenges stereotyped thinking. Students felt that work experience gave them a good idea of what work was like in their placement and, to a lesser extent, helped them to decide about their career. Just over half said that after their placement they felt more interested in doing well at school. These and other findings in the report suggest that the two-week block placement still has a valuable contribution to make to careers programmes, but there is scope for improving the gains which can be made.

Broadly similar conclusions may be drawn from Ofsted reports. *Improving City Schools* (2000) found that work experience and community projects broaden pupils' experiences and form an important link with local employers and services. *Extending work-related learning at Key Stage 4* (2001) found that some schools did not appropriately match pupils' aspirations and aptitudes to work-related learning opportunities nor did it ensure that they have a clear pathway into the next stage of education and training. Many schools did not provide pupils in Year 9 with adequate guidance before choosing the work-related option and those which did often failed to follow up the career action plans which had been formulated. Ofsted recommended that more should be done to provide parents and pupils with careers information and guidance about the arrangements.

Careers information

The Ofsted *National Survey of Careers Education and Guidance* (1998a) showed that 10% of schools lacked a dedicated careers library and that in one-quarter of schools the quality of careers information was unsatisfactory. Access to the library for one in four students was poor and over half of schools did not make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) for careers work. The situation was even less favourable in special schools and PRUs (1998b). The findings of the QPID review (2001) suggested that little had changed since 1998. The publication of good practice guides such as *Careers Information in Schools and Colleges - Guidelines* (1999) in the *Better Choices* series has been one strategy for promoting improvement. Ofsted reported that good practice guides such as this were being used effectively in 70% of schools - the problem is how to reach the remaining 30%.

Developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in careers work is currently the focus of considerable interest. This is a reflection of the potential of ICT to provide young people with easily accessible, comprehensive and up-to-date careers information as well as e-learning and e-guidance. A start has been made on developing a national Connexions website and helpline for young people. Many careers/Connexions services have developed ICT-based services and some schools and colleges are beginning to develop intranet and web-based provision. Software publishers are upgrading existing programs and launching new ones. BECTa produced *Connecting Careers and ICT* (2001) for the DfES with an associated web site (www.becta.org.uk/careersict). However, recent research by NFER (Morris *et al*, 2001) found that teachers' levels of satisfaction with ICT provision were generally lower than those for careers library and paper resources. This was related to concerns about difficulties of access and use, the quality of content and how it is structured.

An *Evaluation of the use of Information and Communications Technology to support Careers Education and Guidance* by the Northern Economic Research Unit (NERU) at the University of Northumbria (2001) argued that a key outcome from handling careers information, especially that mediated through new technology, should be the acquisition and development of data and research skills so that students could become self-directed managers of their own careers. The NERU study of 25 schools and colleges in particular highlights the potential of ICT to provide differentiated, personalised and relevant careers information which students can access when they are ready to engage. The study identified a number of key factors affecting the effective utilisation of ICT including: the existence of a strategy, the integration of the use of ICT in the careers programme, time to manage the increased flow and range of information, access to and reliability of hardware, costs and funding, timetabling flexibility to organise small group work, mediation and debrief, students' home access to ICT,

the quality of software and websites, and the level of ICT expertise of careers co-ordinators. The study reported few developments related to the use of mobile phones, internet-enabled TVs, internet cafés, video-conferencing and chat rooms. It also suggested that further research is needed into issues such as how to improve the use of ICT in career planning, how to improve localised labour market and course information, and gender differences in the utilisation of ICT in careers work (also raised by Morris *et al.*, 1999b). The study also mentioned that the quality of software products could be improved if young people and not just careers and ICT experts were involved in their development.

Several reports refer to unresolved difficulties over the provision of information on post-16 options. The study by SWA Consulting (DfEE, 1998c) reported that information was at an acceptable level of quality for less than half the students in their survey. Ofsted (1998a) found that 25% of students in schools with sixth forms do not receive impartial information and advice from teachers. Colleges particularly value the role which the careers service has traditionally played as a source of impartial information and advice to school students (DfEE, 1999). It is likely that the situation with regard to information on post-16 options has changed little and that further strategies to ensure independent and impartial information and advice will need to be considered if the vision for 14-19 education is to become a reality.

Careers guidance

The most recent NFER study for the DfES (Morris *et al.*, 2001) reported some tension between schools and careers services over the way careers services prioritised students for interview. While schools supported the principle of meeting the needs of the disaffected and those at risk, they were unhappy that the majority might lose out. Careers co-ordinators expressed their lack of confidence, and a lack of capacity, in their ability to provide individual guidance to students in Year 11 who were outside the focusing agenda target group. Another concern was that only half felt confident that all staff knew how to identify and refer young people for specialist careers advice. This is linked to a reported increase in drop-out from post-16 academic courses, said to be partly the result of insufficient preparation of Year 11's outside the target group, with consequent poor decision making. The *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* Green Paper (DfES, 2002a) recognises the need for earlier and better guidance provision.

The QPID study (2001) noted a trend to meet the needs of students who are not part of any target group by providing access to information, group work and self-referral arrangements such as clinics; but they also reported that group work and group interviews were often found to be unsatisfactory by both practitioners and students and that there was a continuing demand for individual guidance interviews for all young people.

The authors of the QPID study recommended that further work was required to address issues such as a differentiated approach to guidance needs, the design and use of diagnostic questionnaires, how to track and record students' career decisions, their participation in guidance services and their destinations.

A key issue is the relationship of curriculum-focused and guidance-focused approaches to young people's career development. The report by SWA Consulting (DfEE, 1998c), for example, claimed to identify a link between many aspects of learning outcomes and good individual and group guidance interviews. The report by Morris *et al.* (2001) found that systems to facilitate the sharing of information about the outcomes of guidance interviews were missing in two-thirds of schools.

Another report by NFER (DfEE, 1998a) also found that careers guidance worked best when the adviser was someone who was known and trusted by students, who listened to them and who was responsive to their changing preferences.

Progress File, the planned successor to the National Record of Achievement, is a guidance system and set of materials designed to help young people with their career planning and transitions. The evaluation of Progress File demonstration projects by Ofsted (2002) reported that in schools where careers programmes were generally good, Progress File activities made a good contribution especially by improving the option choice process. However, they found that Progress File had little impact on raising career aspirations. Despite more effective use of Progress File in special schools and pupil referral units, the report concluded that the potential of Progress File is yet to be realised in most schools. The reports to date suggest that further practical advice is needed to help schools and colleges make the most of Progress File in their careers education and guidance provision.

Little research has been carried out into the career development and guidance needs of gifted and talented students. A few careers/Connexions services have developed and locally evaluated careers-related activities for gifted and talented students as part of wider education initiatives including the Excellence in Cities and summer schools programmes. A database of resources for gifted and talented students has been created on the DfES-funded Xcalibre website. Further support for schools on meeting the careers education and guidance needs of gifted and talented young people would be helpful.

Evaluation, inspection and quality standards

A key issue for action identified by Ofsted in their national survey (1998a&b) is that headteachers and careers co-ordinators should be more active in regularly monitoring and evaluating careers education and guidance to raise

standards. There is little evidence to suggest that the situation has changed much since the survey. However, the planned publication by Ofsted of guidance on the inspection of careers education and guidance 11-19 in 2002 will assist self-evaluation by schools and colleges providing for this age group.

The careers education and guidance and school effectiveness study (Morris *et al.*, 2000) reported that schools had adopted two key strategies for checking the effectiveness of their careers programmes. The first strategy is to accredit careers education and guidance outcomes for students but this practice is not widespread. The second strategy whereby schools work within a quality framework or gain a local quality award or framework is more developed. While such awards and frameworks were credited with helping schools to improve curriculum planning and management, they did not appear to have had a major impact on helping schools to move forward in terms of reviewing or re-focusing the rationale for their programmes. The NACGT survey (1999) of 1500 schools identified over 40 local quality awards and reported that 15% said that they had gained an award while a further 28% claimed to be working towards one.

The QPID review (2001) highlighted the lack of consistency in the way Ofsted reports on the effectiveness of careers education and guidance in school inspections. Careers service managers cited reports which either gave a positive assessment or failed to comment on schools where they regarded the careers education as poorly developed. There is a need to rationalise Ofsted's approach to the inspection and reporting of careers education and guidance in order to secure and improve its judgements.

A review of the research literature on careers and gender (Askew, 2002) suggests that careers programmes have had little impact on tackling equal opportunities issues such as stereotyping, discrimination and under-achievement. Schools' efforts are often simplistic but there are gaps in our current knowledge and more research is needed in how to challenge inequality and unfairness through careers education and guidance.

Training and professional development

Surveys by Ofsted (1998a) and NACGT (1999) showed that one-third of careers education practitioners, encouraged perhaps by the availability of generous inset funding, have gained a professional qualification in careers work such as a certificate/advanced certificate or a diploma. The challenge now is how to encourage and enable all specialists involved in careers work to gain an accredited award.

A recent survey (Morris *et al.*, 2001) found that a higher proportion - nearly half the co-ordinators surveyed - had achieved a nationally recognised qualification in careers work. They also reported that provision and practice were more effective in schools with a qualified careers specialist.

However, few of the non-specialist staff involved in careers work had a qualification or access to one. Ofsted (1998b) expressed concern that a significant number of careers co-ordinators and teachers in special schools had not taken up INSET opportunities for a number of different reasons.

As a result of current funding arrangements, careers/ Connexions services have a key role in promoting in-service training opportunities for specialists and non-specialists involved in careers work in schools and colleges. Further guidance for careers/Connexions services on the effective use of this funding would help to increase the supply of trained specialists and non-specialists.

The current lack of a national framework for the training of staff involved in careers work is a deficiency. A framework of the knowledge, understanding and skills needed by careers practitioners would help training providers and awarding bodies to design courses and qualifications and make it easier to modularise training and equivalence qualifications. The basis for this work already exists in the national occupational standards for careers work which have already been developed; but it is significant that there has been little demand for an NVQ award based on these standards. It would be helpful to review the reasons for the lack of demand for an NVQ and to base recommendations for action on the outcomes. It is possible, for example, that smaller qualifications based on a single NVQ unit or a cluster of units may be more popular.

Currently, there is very little opportunity for newly-qualified teachers or those undertaking initial teacher training to find out about the role of all teachers in careers work or, if they are interested, to develop careers work as a specialism. The findings of the Teachers' Awareness of Careers Outside Teaching (TASCOT) Project (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1998) help to make the case for opening a debate on the part that careers education and guidance should play in ITT and NQT programmes. The project found that most secondary teachers were engaged in careers education although they were unwilling to acknowledge responsibility for the role they played. Their perception of careers education and guidance was misguided and their careers knowledge base was often unreliable.

The NERU project suggested that the roles of careers staff may need to change to support the increased use of ICT in careers programmes. Careers teachers, for example, may need to be available on demand to facilitate, enable and mediate students' individualised career learning. This has implications for the training needs of careers teachers. The authors also suggest a possible future role for trained careers assistants in supporting individuals' careers-related activities. These 'para-professionals' could be recruited from suitable people already working in the school such as IT technicians, librarians, learning mentors and parent volunteers. This development could be linked to the Government's initiative to increase the supply of support

staff to work alongside teachers. Currently, careers staff in nearly two-thirds of schools have access to administrative assistants who perform tasks such as organising work experience, although the NFER study for the DfEE (Morris *et al.*, 2001) questioned the adequacy of the support available.

COLLEGES

In the college context, it is not always appropriate to group careers education and guidance together. They are sometimes treated as two separate areas. In most cases, careers guidance has been developed more fully as suggested by the number of college staff who are working towards or have achieved qualifications in guidance. Careers education has often been less well developed. Recent developments such as GNVQ and enrichment funding for tutorials appear to have brought careers education back onto the agenda.

Policy initiatives

The policy agenda in colleges is dominated by two key issues. The most important college-wide issue is retention and achievement, linked to unit funding. This is closely related to the issue of inspection requirements, especially the new emphasis in the framework on educational and social inclusion. These two issues largely determine colleges' approach to careers education and guidance (Sadler, 2002a&b).

Curriculum issues for the 16-19 age group tend to be dominated by curriculum 2000 and Key Skills.

The impact of *Success for All - Reforming Further Education and Training* (2002) is also likely to influence colleges' approach to careers education and guidance.

Senior management teams in colleges are more likely to develop the role of careers education and guidance when they perceive that it is one of the strategies which can help the college respond to government initiatives and achieve its priorities. Where this connection has not been made, careers work is less well developed.

Working with partners

The joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) identified as a strength the partnership agreements and joint working arrangements between careers services and colleges for the shared delivery of careers education and guidance. The report suggested upgrading the partnership agreement process and extending course tutors' awareness of it.

There is little research evidence relating to the impact on colleges of recent policy changes affecting careers service priorities. The joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) reported that the early impact of the refocusing policy had been mixed with some colleges identifying negative outcomes and others able to identify positive outcomes.

There is also little research evidence relating to the effectiveness of links with employers and parents to promote careers education and guidance. The joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) found that colleges in their self-assessment reports generally had little to say in this area, but where it was mentioned, it was usually to highlight good practice. The reticence of colleges in this area may be related to the fact that employer liaison is mainly done through programme areas rather than student services or tutors.

College-wide leadership and management

The diversity of institutions within the college sector is associated with a wide variation in careers provision and practice. A broad distinction can be made between sixth form colleges and further education (FE) and tertiary colleges. Sixth form college arrangements still tend to reflect the legacy of being under schools regulations by having a careers co-ordinator, tutor-delivered careers education activities for all, externally-provided specialist careers guidance activities and a careers library. FE and tertiary colleges are more likely to have a head of student services, tutor-delivered careers education activities for some, guidance by a careers adviser in the student services team supplemented by the inputs of external specialists and a careers centre. Inevitably, the picture in practice is a great deal more varied and complicated.

The joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) noted that few colleges had a statement of policy on careers education and guidance and that this was linked to a lack of coherence in the provision. It recognised the problem of the uneven response from different curriculum areas within a college to the support offered by careers staff.

The NERU study (2001) identified a number of key challenges including how to provide cost effective access for students based in outreach centres or on other sites where resources are concentrated centrally in student support facilities. The authors also discussed difficulties relating to how students are targeted for help, how their needs are diagnosed and how their progress is tracked. Reliance on self-referral mechanisms may allow some young people to slip through the net. They noted the current priority given to those who are disaffected or 'at risk' rather than prioritising on the basis of the individual's experience of careers education and guidance to date or the existence of practical plans for education or employment in the future.

The DfEE/FEFC survey (1999) recognised the importance of the commitment of college senior managers to the success of careers education and guidance.

Curriculum provision and development
Careers education

The 1997 FEFC *Good Practice Report - Careers Education and Guidance* concluded that colleges increasingly recognised the need to provide careers education and guidance of high

quality but that it was rare to find all the aspects of good practice identified by FEFC operating in one college.

Most colleges include a statement of entitlement to careers education and guidance in the information they give to prospective students. The 1999 inspection survey recommended that colleges and careers services ensure that during induction students are made aware of the careers resources available.

The DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) highlighted some good practice in support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially in specialist colleges. The features of effective practice in this area included work on progression, action plans and annual reviews, work experience, maintaining individual contact, close working with and support for parents, and effective links with the 'home' careers service in the area where the student lives. The weaknesses in provision in both specialist and general FE colleges relate to the lack of a co-ordinated or fully understood approach to careers education and guidance.

The same survey found that the most usual format for the delivery of careers education and guidance programmes was through a combination of group sessions focusing on a specific topic of general interest, and one-to-one sessions which offered guidance and advice to the individual student. This provision was more effective when it was well-planned.

The NERU study (2001) noted that one case study FE college had designed its services on the assumption that schools had already taken care of the 'education' part of careers education and guidance. Although colleges put a great deal of effort into pre-entry guidance, the authors of the study commented on the shortcomings of this view given likely differences in provision between feeder schools and students' varying levels of motivation to engage.

College documentation on careers education and guidance frequently emphasises the objective of increasing students' awareness of options and progression opportunities. The joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey found that this aspect of provision was more developed than activities to provide students with the opportunity to develop the skills, understanding and self-awareness they need in order to make decisions and manage their careers effectively. They noted that there were indications that this aspect of careers education and guidance was now receiving more attention.

One shortcoming identified by the DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) was the significant number of part-time students who could benefit from careers education and guidance but whose needs were not being met.

Most surveys suggest that information and advice about higher education applications is more highly developed than information and advice for employment seekers.

Careers information

As in schools (Ofsted 1998a), the careers library initiative is credited with having a positive impact on the comprehensiveness and currency of the materials available.

The DfEE/FEFC survey (1999) praised the extensive and varied range of materials available in most college careers libraries but criticised the under-use of these resources. Specific shortcomings included out-of-date and unattractive displays and variations in quality between sites. The survey recommended that colleges improve their monitoring of the use of resources.

Careers guidance

The DfEE/FEFC survey found that accommodation was generally good: attractive, accessible and highly visible. In some cases, interview facilities were less satisfactory.

The same survey also found that students' positive comments about the helpfulness and value of the groupwork sessions and guidance interviews they had received far outweighed critical comments. However, the report identified weaknesses in the targeting of individual support, especially guidance interviews which could be compounded through students failing to keep appointments and through inadequate arrangements for sharing information on students between careers and teaching staff. This wastage was most likely to occur where careers education and guidance was not given a high profile in the college and where the rationale for guidance interviews and the systems supporting them were not well developed.

There is some evidence to suggest that pre-entry guidance has continued to improve since the joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999). This has been linked to a growing trend to centrally organise this aspect of guidance provision.

The NERU study (2001) noted that college lecturers on vocational courses have specialist knowledge and networks of contacts in their particular vocational areas which they make available to students through the careers-related content of their courses, supplemented in some cases by presentations given by careers staff. The authors also reported the view in the case study colleges that teaching staff in general (as opposed to those on vocational courses) were under such pressure that they could not be relied upon to offer careers guidance. There is some anecdotal evidence that students on general education courses may find it difficult to gain access to advice and information from lecturers in different vocational areas unless careers staff in student services have built strong networks to enable this to happen.

The earlier DfEE/FEFC study had noted that uneven joint working between careers staff (including careers service staff) and staff in different curriculum areas was a major weakness in provision.

A recent study by Martinez (2002) found that students drop out from college courses for reasons which are mainly to do with their studies and the institutions they are attending. This seems to confirm the findings of the MORI study on post-16 switching. Significant factors include: the suitability of the course for the individual, its relevance to their career plans, the course's intrinsic interest, the overall quality of teaching and the help and support received from teachers, e.g. in moving into a job or higher qualification. Studies such as this suggest that careers education and guidance could play a significant part in strengthening retention and achievement by reducing the mismatch of students to courses at the pre-entry stage and ensuring that course switching is managed effectively 'on programme'.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the reduction in access to guidance for some students at Key Stage 4 has led to an increase in the number of college applicants without well thought out career plans.

Evaluation, inspection and quality standards

The DfEE/FEFC survey of 30 colleges (1999) identified weaknesses in colleges' own monitoring and evaluation of provision to inform quality assurance arrangements and to improve standards; but the survey reported that self-assessment and action planning were of considerable value to both colleges and careers services. Some colleges benefit from contributing evidence to and sharing feedback from careers service quality assurance activities.

The report also signalled an important change from quality assuring processes and organisation to evaluating the impact of careers education and guidance on the user, although evaluation of learning outcomes was still a relatively new approach.

Many colleges have adopted the national quality standards developed by the Guidance Council, relaunched in 2002 as the Matrix standards. However, these standards do not include quality criteria for the assessment of careers education activities.

Training and professional development

The joint DfEE/FEFC inspection survey (1999) noted that college careers staff were increasingly undertaking relevant qualifications such as NVQ levels 3 and 4 in Guidance.

The same survey also found that college tutors and teachers showed insufficient awareness of the partnership agreements and insufficient clarity and understanding about roles and responsibilities. The survey encountered some instances of a lack of trust between careers staff and tutors and recommended that steps should be taken to ensure that tutors receive the support and development needed to deliver careers education and guidance effectively. Such training should focus on the skills needed to deliver

careers education and guidance rather than simply briefing tutors on college systems for providing it. However, some studies point out that some tutors contest their role in careers education and guidance.

CONCLUSIONS

This review highlights the progress and continuing improvements made by a significant minority of schools and colleges that have a well-established commitment to careers education and guidance. It also confirms the existence of obstacles to progress and improvement in many schools and colleges. The reasons are complex and diverse. The schools research commissioned by the DfES between 1998 and 2001 is extremely useful in illuminating these reasons and providing insights into the factors which will be critical for the successful implementation of Connexions. It is important that this record of practical research is maintained and extended into areas about which we currently know little.

Current educational initiatives offer considerable scope for developing the contribution of careers education and guidance to meeting young people's needs and improving schools and colleges. It is up to careers education and guidance professionals and practitioners, both nationally and locally, to make the most of these opportunities.

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