

## **Career Guidance for Adults in England: a joint policy position paper by NIACE and NAEGA (June 2011)**

### **SUMMARY**

#### **Purpose of the paper**

This paper aims to inform debate about the future of adult career guidance in England. At this time of significant economic uncertainty and government reform, NIACE and NAEGA believe that it is appropriate to both re-evaluate and reaffirm the role and potential of adult career guidance for individuals, communities and society. The development now underway of the new national careers service provides a further imperative for critical reflection on the shape and function of adult career guidance as a whole.

In this paper, we outline what our two organisations believe to be the key issues for consideration in the development of adult career guidance services that can meet the needs of all adults across a lifespan.

#### **Headline messages**

**Economic instability and career development** While labour markets have always been dynamic in nature, the instability and unpredictability of the current labour market creates challenges for both *career planners* and *career advisers*. Government commitment is to reshaping the economy from one that relies on publicly funded services to one that relies more on the private sector with a focus on local decision-making and the development of the big society. Austerity measures put in place by government to reduce the deficit and wider government reforms around the public sector mean that previously identified and understood career and employment routes are changing. Add to the mix rising unemployment (particularly amongst the under 25s) and an increase in part-time work and the challenge for adults making careers decisions becomes apparent.

**Adult career guidance and the big society** Adult career guidance has a role to play in shaping the big society, and the big society agenda has implications for the provision of adult guidance services. This relationship is exemplified in the role of community learning champions (CLCs). Their work supports community empowerment and the involvement of citizens in the planning and delivery of local services, strengthens the role of the voluntary sector and partnerships between voluntary organisations and public services, and facilitates individual voluntary action. CLC are the front line of career guidance, and should be integral to a coherent local guidance 'offer.'

**Reform of fees and funding for learning and skills** Equipping adults to navigate the changing and increasingly complex landscape of fees, funding, loans and entitlements around learning will be a key role for career guidance in the coming years. Adults will need help to identify and weigh up the likely costs and benefits of different learning options, to understand how any potential investment in learning relates to their future aims and aspirations, and to make informed decisions about the acquisition of debt. To be effective implementers of change, front line guidance practitioners will need access to on-going professional development.

**Welfare reform** Enabling social mobility and supporting people into sustainable employment with prospects are fundamental goals of adult career guidance, and are central themes within current welfare reform policy. However, greater clarity is needed about the role of professional careers advisers within the emerging employment support system, and the relationship of adult guidance services to Jobcentre Plus.

**Labour market information** While high level labour market information will be relevant to some people, what many adults need is a translation of labour market information into the reality of job opportunities in localities based on such factors as age, skills, experience, pay and conditions. While NIACE and NAEGA recognise the achievements to date in terms of the development of LMI resources we believe that the upskilling of advisers with regard to the use of labour market data within the constraints of day-to-day service delivery needs greater emphasis and resource.

**Balancing needs** Effective adult career guidance explores both 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. The over-riding goal of government funding is currently the hard outcomes of labour market engagement and, where possible, sustainable employment. While these priorities are both reasonable and understandable, we are concerned that the potential for individual *advancement* and the encouraged of *aspiration* does not get overlooked. If the balance swings too much in the direction of hard outcomes and 'job placement' there is a risk that many adults will become stuck in labour market 'churn' or jobs that provide little or no opportunity for progression. Adult career guidance outcomes need to balance the needs and interests (short and longer-term) of the individual with the immediate requirements of economic growth and structural reform and the priorities of the government's social mobility agenda.

**Complexity and multiplicity of needs** The complexity and multiplicity of needs addressed through adult career guidance interventions cannot be underestimated. The issues that may need to be resolved before an individual can move forward may be personal, financial or social, as well as about skills and qualifications. In many cases they overlap and are interdependent. Adult career guidance services can only support the complexity of needs if they are resourced and structured to do so, and if the staff (whether professionals or volunteer advocates) have the requisite skills and knowledge. Strong networks and partnerships underpin high quality provision as does an ongoing commitment to regular upskilling and updating of front-line advisers on the immediate and wider labour market environment and policy and structural reform and the impact this has on individual career decisions.

**Building the architecture of a new service** Building the architecture for the adult provision within a National Careers Service requires vision and ambition combined with a large dose of pragmatism and realism. It involves the definition of a national service delivery model that will ensure a consistent offer across the country at the same time as tailored provision at a local level. Much of the core offer is already in place through the current Next Step service. However, key areas require further development, including: open access centres in community locations; branding; a statement of client entitlement; and articulation with young people's services.

**Technology** Information and communications technology (ICT) has emerged as a key medium for the delivery of career guidance. It has huge potential, but it is important that it is not viewed as a 'magic bullet'. Not everyone has the skills or the desire to engage effectively with ICT-based provision, and the strong correlation between social exclusion and digital exclusion means that those with the least capacity to engage may have the greatest need of guidance services. Providing opportunities for people to develop their digital skills, whilst maintaining a diversity of approaches to the delivery of careers guidance, should be integral to service design.

**Professionalising the workforce** The commitment to the professionalisation of the careers sector workforce through the work of the Careers Profession Alliance is welcome. This is a positive step and one that will transform the careers sector. However, the professionalisation of the workforce cannot be viewed as a panacea for gaps in provision, or any lack of commitment to a nationally determined service offer. Nor can it avoid addressing the issue of the private sector who, unless working on public sector contracts or volunteering to become involved, will be under no obligation to meet the same expectations as those working in the public sector.

### **How to join the debate**

This paper is available to download from the NIACE and NAEGA websites. Comments and responses should be emailed to [guidance@niace.org.uk](mailto:guidance@niace.org.uk) by 29<sup>th</sup> July 2011. A short paper summarising the feedback and the ways in which it develops the arguments set out in this position paper will be prepared and published.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Purpose of this paper**

This joint position paper is published in response to the rapidly changing policy context for adult career guidance in England. NIACE and NAEGA believe that participation in learning is a public good benefiting individual, communities and business alike. The motivation to learn and maintain skills from people who have completed the compulsory participation stage of education is highly dependent on the availability of appropriate career guidance.

The purpose of this paper is to reconfirm the original values and goals of adult career guidance as well as reflect on its role and potential in a changing economy and within a culture of significant government reform. The paper outlines what the two organisations collectively regard as key issues for consideration in the development of adult career guidance services. It will provide the basis of a dialogue between NIACE and NAEGA and the learning and guidance sector, the results of which will inform the two organisations' policy and advocacy work.

We believe this intervention is important and necessary at this time. While we understand the key elements of the adult offer are already in place through the current Next Step service we have, as yet, no detailed information on the final model of service offer. Our central concern is that the wider reform context, the unpredictability of the economy, the needs of individual adults and the needs of front-line adult career guidance practitioners are all effectively balanced in the development of the new service. This position is reflected throughout this paper.

### **1.2 Meeting the reform challenge**

Since coming to power in May 2010 the Coalition government has embarked on a reform programme unprecedented in its scale, speed and reach. These reforms are redrawing the learning, skills and employment landscape in ways that may be difficult to predict. In particular we are witnessing:

- an austerity programme resulting in 'efficiency savings' being made across all areas of public spending;
- welfare reform and the introduction of the Work Programme, which aims to move two million people claiming out-of-work benefits into employment by 2014;
- reform of fees and funding regimes in Further and Higher Education, with the reduction of state support and emphasis on 'co-financing' of study by individual learners;
- pursuit of 'big society, small government' as an underpinning principle.

In April, Skills Minister John Hayes announced proposals for the establishment of a National Careers Service. While the adult part of the National Careers Service will build on the good practice of the existing Next Step service, responsibility for securing services for young people will be shifted primarily to schools. The loss of wider access to generic career guidance for young people under the age of 19 has been the subject of a robust campaign

conducted by stakeholders directly affected, primarily through UKCSS, Careers England and UNISON. NIACE and NAEGA share the concerns expressed about the proposals for career guidance for young people especially in the light of the rising rate of unemployment in the under-25s and the phased introduction of higher tuition fees and loan entitlements in both Further and Higher Education. We wish to focus here, however on the implications of the changes for adult career guidance provision, in particular:

- decentralisation in employment and skills;
- building the big society;
- reform of fees and funding for learning and skills;
- welfare reform and the Work Programme;
- addressing user needs
- delivering services

## **2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW POLICY LANDSCAPE**

### **2.1 Decentralisation in employment and skills**

Central to the Coalition's policy discourse is the intention to devolve decision-making powers and control from central government to local government and communities. The focus has shifted away from implementing nationally driven approaches towards giving greater 'freedoms and flexibilities' to employment and skills providers to plan and develop local solutions.

In its recent review of employment and skills systems, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) found evidence of, 'joint working at a local level, driven by the ambition to deliver better outcomes for customers, which often takes place despite inflexibilities of the systems.'<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on developing career guidance services in the future that are responsive to the realities of local labour markets can be seen in the government's new proposals for the reform of prisoner education. Vocational training opportunities will be provided which reflect the needs of the labour market in the area where the prisoner will be resettled. Meanwhile, the current prisoner careers information and advice service is to be merged with the National Careers Service, with the aim of improving coherence and continuity of provision for offenders before and after release.<sup>2</sup>

The commitment to creating meaningful and coherent local employment and skills ecologies, of which career guidance services are an integral part, is welcome. Clearly, it makes sense to prepare people for jobs that actually exist and to shape provision to respond to immediate community needs and opportunities. Partnership working between local providers – in the public, private and voluntary sectors - should be central to the new service, with the shape and structure of networks reflecting local circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> UKCES (2011) *Review of Employment and Skills*.

<sup>2</sup> BIS / Ministry of Justice (2011) *Making Prison Work*.

### **The Multi-Access Centre approach, City of Leicester**

In Leicester, a network of neighbourhood Multi-Access Centres (MACs) provides integrated, end-to-end skills and employment support for adults who are out of work, with a particular though not exclusive focus on helping those conventionally viewed as being ‘furthest from the labour market.’ Community-based career guidance advisers located in the MACs draw on information provided by city-wide employer engagement and business development workers to support customers to access sector-specific vocational training that has been designed in consultation with local employers. Customers also receive support with confidence building and action planning, referrals to literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision, help with job search and interview skills, and signposting to advice services (many of which are co-located with the MACs) for help with wider issues that can act as barriers to learning and work such as debt, legal concerns, childcare and domestic violence. This integrated approach equips people to compete successfully for vacancies that arise.

However, fairness requires a minimum level of consistency and quality of provision regardless of where an individual lives. Work undertaken in the Review of Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults<sup>3</sup> found that to achieve consistency in both provision of services and expectations of adult clients, to avoid a post-code lottery of services and to ensure quality of provision, the model for adult career guidance should be determined nationally but delivered sub-nationally and tailored at a local level to meet specific needs.

The current Next Step model does exactly this. While the model is standardised at a national level, along with targets and expected outcomes, the regional and local delivery arrangements reflect the needs of the regions and areas that they serve. National provision through telephone and web services provides exactly that – a national service that can be easily accessed by any adult and that can provide a link through to more specific localised services as appropriate.

## **2.2 Building the big society**

The Coalition has identified a three-fold purpose for adult learning and skills:

- to drive economic growth;
- to support social justice;
- to build the big society.<sup>4</sup>

The last of these represents one of the chief organising principles across domestic policy, even as its meaning remains contentious, contested and malleable. Adult career guidance intersects with the big society agenda at a number of points, and both challenges and opportunities arise from the emerging dialogue. The big society entails radical reform of public services and the stated intention is to move power and responsibility wherever

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<sup>3</sup> *Cross-government review of information, advice and guidance for adults, 2005-2007*

<sup>4</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2010) *Skills for Sustainable Growth: strategy document*.

possible away from national government to those best placed to find solutions at local level. Behind the agenda are three defining goals: public service reform; community empowerment and social action.

In the drive to realise the big society, an expanded role for voluntary and community sector service providers represents an important theme. The VCS has a strong tradition of working in partnership with mainstream adult careers services to develop and deliver provision at a local level. It is recognised as a vital piece in the guidance jigsaw because of its ability to reach and support people from the most marginalised social groups who are often excluded from mainstream provision, including for example, ex-offenders, recent migrants, refugees, homeless people and mental health service users. In setting out the proposals for the National Careers Service, the government signalled its intention to continue to support a network of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to provide face-to-face services to adults from 'priority groups'. Yet evidence from the front line suggests that cuts made to public spending over the past year are threatening to have a devastating impact on charities, as the funds which flow to them from both central government and local public-sector partners dry up. There are signs that ministers are alive to these unintended consequences of austerity measures.<sup>5</sup> Ensuring that an appropriately diverse and targeted blend of provision remains available within communities is critical to constructing a service that is accessible to those in greatest need.

An approach that has proved highly effective in engaging people from excluded communities (both of place and interest) to begin the journey of learning and skills development is the deployment of community learning champions (CLCs). In many ways CLCs exemplify what have been claimed as big society values, although the approach has been popular for many years among local authority and voluntary sector learning providers.

### **The Community Learning Champions National Support Programme**

The Community Learning Champions National Support Programme was established in 2009 and currently supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). In the Programme's first eighteen months, CLCs supported by it reached some 100,000 people.

For more information visit: [www.communitylearningchampions.org.uk](http://www.communitylearningchampions.org.uk)

CLCs are trained volunteers, enthusiasts who have had their own lives transformed by learning and now wish to encourage and support their peers to take part. Often, the learning to which they support people is what is currently termed informal adult and community learning (IACL). That is, usually unaccredited and evolving in response to the interests, concerns and passions of learners themselves. CLCs represent the front line of career guidance delivery, fulfilling in their communities a role analogous to that of Union

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<sup>5</sup> This was evident, for example, in the direction from Communities Secretary Eric Pickles to local authorities to limit the impact of cuts on voluntary sector partners. However, there is a clear tension between such instructions and the principle of localism.

Learning Reps (ULRs) in the workplace. Some CLCs progress, through formal training and qualification, to paid posts in career guidance or to the teaching of adults.

The work of CLCs highlights a number of issues relevant to the development of adult career guidance. To be effective, CLCs need training, development and on-going support, access to up-to-date information about learning and work opportunities in their area, and knowledge about where and how to refer people for more in-depth guidance. Attention needs to be paid as to how the role of CLCs can be supported and developed through partner organisations and CLCs recognised as an integral element within local career guidance activities.

Secondly, IACL needs to be recognised as a vital component in the mosaic of learning within an area. It can both support progression to more formal, career-orientated learning and bring a range of other social benefits for individuals. The implications of this are twofold:

- IACL opportunities need to be recognised as ‘outcomes’ to the adult career guidance process in that they are often the starting point of a much longer learning journey;
- Elements of adult career guidance should be an integral part of IACL provision.

Thirdly, CLCs can contribute to community empowerment and involvement in local decision making. Through the linking of volunteering, grass roots democratic engagement activities and adult and community learning, CLC projects offer local authorities and others an effective approach to working with communities to improve the planning and delivery of local services. Much of this kind of work carried out to date by CLCs has involved their feeding back information to learning providers about the learning needs and interests of others in their community. It prompts the question, how will local people be involved in shaping the career guidance offer in their area under the National Careers Service? The development and embedding of effective mechanism to enable ‘service user voice’ must be fundamental to big society style public service reform, and the agenda’s influence is evident in current debates in other areas of the learning and skills sector, such as FE governance.

### **2.3 Reform of fees and funding for learning and skills**

Enabling adults to navigate the changing landscape of fees, funding, loans and entitlements around learning will be a key role for career guidance in the coming years. Government policy aims to achieve greater co-funding of learning, with individual learners paying a greater proportion of the costs and a concomitant reduction in the contribution from public funds. Major changes are afoot, in particular:

- Full automatic fee remission for learners taking qualifications above Level 2 is being targeted towards a narrowing group of adults, specifically those on so-called ‘active benefits’, i.e. Job Seekers Allowance and Employment Support Allowance (Work Related Activity Group). The result is that some groups of adults, for example lone parents on income support and people in low paid work claiming housing or council tax benefit, will no longer be able to claim fee remission.

- Loans to cover the cost of learning at Level 3 will be introduced, with income contingent repayments similar to those being introduced for HE students.

Ensuring that adults have access to up-to-date, impartial advice that is tailored to their specific needs and circumstances will be critical if the implementation of these policies is not to act as a disincentive to participation in learning and skills development. Adults will need help to identify and weigh up the likely costs and benefits of different learning options, to understand how any potential investment in learning relates to their future aims and aspirations, and to make informed decisions about the acquisition of debt. The role of learning accounts as a mechanism to enable learners to manage the financial dimension of learning will be crucial. Moreover, the funding situation is likely to remain in a state of flux. A tapering of eligibility for fee remission over the next two years is proposed, and legislation to remove the statutory entitlement to full funding (the Level 2 entitlement) is completing its passage through Parliament.

As the changing picture unfolds both adults and the advisers who support them will require reliable sources of information about funding, learning options and employment opportunities and the skills to interpret them. Given the amount and speed of the changes, and their complexity, it is unrealistic to expect front-line guidance practitioners to be the effective implementers of the changes without a national programme of updating and development of their professional knowledge and skills around areas that are either new and complex (e.g. reform of fees) or shifting and volatile (e.g. the labour market). Issues like the provision of advice on investment in learning versus debt acquisition and job opportunities in an unstable economic environment are challenging and critical. As potential ‘agents of change’ for wider government reform front-line advisers need the resources, time and training to enable them to deliver on expectations.

## **2.4 Welfare reform and the Work Programme**

Supporting people into sustainable employment is an understandable goal for a government committed to reducing public sector spending and what is seen as a culture of reliance on the benefit system, and is one which reflects the genuine desire of most unemployed adults to find work.

In a recent report the Institute for Public Policy Research<sup>6</sup> argues that sustainable employment can only really be achieved in the long term, through a more innovative, considered approach with a greater emphasis on ‘advancement’:

‘Improving job sustainability means providing labour market interventions that are lasting and result in a measure of security in work for people at the lower end of the labour market. Principally, this is about ending the ‘low pay, no pay’ cycles of work and unemployment. However, there is little attention given to whether people have the opportunity to progress from entry-level jobs to jobs with higher pay and better working conditions. This is despite evidence suggestion that, after the initial period

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<sup>6</sup> *More than a foot in the door: job sustainability and advancement in London and the UK*, IPPR, March 2011.

in work, job quality and opportunities for retention and advancement become more important in achieving sustainability (NAO, 2007).’

‘Advancement’ in the widest possible sense needs to underpin all publicly funded career guidance and employment advice to avoid the risk of individuals becoming trapped on a treadmill of poorly paid employment with few prospects. Breaking the longer-term cycle is arguably more important, and is certainly more challenging, than finding short-term fixes. The policy focus on social mobility, overseen by ‘social mobility tsar’ Alan Milburn, reflects a recognition that both for individuals and across generations the lack of opportunity to get on in work and in life can become entrenched. We want to see the principle of ‘advancement’ at the heart of both the Work Programme and the National Careers Service.

The challenge is always going to be, however, one of articulating outcomes from provision that are meaningful to the achievement of policy objectives at the same time as being meaningful to the longer-term goals, aspirations and advancement of individual users. Perhaps nowhere is this tension more starkly illustrated than in the government’s intention to extend the principle of ‘conditionality’ for claimants of ‘active benefits’ to include a greater level of mandating to learning and skills development, where lack of a particular skills has been identified as a barrier to work.

Under these proposals, Next Step/National Careers Service advisers will work with Jobcentre Plus and local learning providers to identify the most suitable provision for claimants. There remains a lack of clarity about the precise nature of the relationship between the two services, but we believe that the role of careers advisers will be key. ‘Pre-employment support’ has a central role to play in building confidence and motivation to learn, and can be delivered by a skilled career guidance practitioner using a range of approaches such as skills and interest tools and action planning. Evaluation of the IES trials confirmed that Skills Health Checks carried out by Next Step advisers were particularly effective at supporting people who were stuck in labour market ‘churn’<sup>7</sup> It will be important that Jobcentre Plus advisers are adept at recognising where claimants need support to review their skills needs and address wider barriers to learning, and make appropriate referrals to Next Step.

However, we have several concerns about the possible consequences for adults of this closer linking of career guidance and skills conditionality. First, it has the potential to undermine the relationship of trust between advisers and their clients, particularly by raising questions for the latter about the extent to which the advice is impartial and centred on addressing their individual needs. It would not be helpful if the National Careers Service were to be viewed as an adjunct of Jobcentre Plus. Secondly, we would like to know more about the way in which this policy relates to the proposed ‘priority groups’ (as yet undefined) for the face to face element of the National Careers Service. In light of the narrowing of eligibility for fee remission for learning to claimants of active benefits, we are anxious that a parallel restricting of access to publicly funded face to face guidance may be in the pipeline. There are key groups who face disadvantage in the labour market – for example lone parents, learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, adults with ESOL

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<sup>7</sup>Department for Work and Pensions (2009) *Qualitative Evaluation of Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation report.*

needs, older workers – who may have a great need for career guidance but are not claiming active benefits.

### **3. SUPPORTING DELIVERY**

#### **3.1 Labour market information and intelligence**

Defining a system for the provision of accurate, up to date labour market information has become the holy grail of careers guidance. The urgency of this quest is frequently articulated in high level terms: identifying potential growth sectors in the national or sub-national economy; forecasting the skills needs of the future; mapping the UK's supposed economic strengths against those of developed and emerging economies in order to preserve or enhance its position on the international league tables and so on.

Much of this work has a sectoral focus, as for example in the current pinpointing of low carbon industries and 'green jobs' as key engines for future growth. Sector skills councils have been charged with identifying the likely future needs within their specific industries. However, there are good grounds for treating this approach with more circumspection than it generally receives, not least because:

- Future labour market developments are unpredictable, particularly in an area such as the green economy which remains very much in its infancy. Research by NIACE found scepticism among sub-national strategic planners in the wake of the recession about the capacity and credibility of economic and skills forecasting.<sup>8</sup>
- Evidence presented to the inquiry into the role of FE colleges in their community currently being undertaken by NIACE, the Association of Colleges and the 157 Group suggests that the process of supporting individuals to navigate the labour market may be further hampered by a lack of coherence at local level between skills planning and provision and the needs of employers. Effective career guidance depends upon the joining up of the needs of individuals with those of employers, and the development of mechanisms to ensure that learning and skills provision is shaped to reflect a dynamic local labour market.
- National and regional labour market *information* is based on statistics and formal data collection techniques as well as input from regional and local planning. Local labour *knowledge* and understanding, however, may look and feel slightly different. This is the knowledge acquired by 'face-to-face' adult career guidance practitioners in their day-to-day work in neighbourhoods, which may be reflected in the statistical data but is likely to be much localised and immediate.

While high level labour market information will be relevant to some people what many adults need is a translation of labour market information into the reality of jobs – and linked employment patterns – in localities and regions based on such factors as age, skills, experience, pay and conditions.

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<sup>8</sup> NIACE (2010) *Learning in the Recession*.

It is also a mistake to suggest that all adults are geographically mobile and can easily relocate for employment . While this might become an option (even a last resort option) for some people, considerations such as family commitments, schooling, housing, community and friendship networks all feature in the decisions adults make about where they work and what they do. The same issues are key factors in decisions that adults may make about investing in their own skill development. Adults present for career guidance with a whole range of existing commitments, skill levels, experience, confidence and even ‘readiness to embrace change’ or take a risk, calculated or otherwise.

Ultimately, regardless of all the analysis that is undertaken on current and future labour markets, unless adult career guidance practitioners are provided with the training to interpret LMI, regularly updated LMI in a usable format, or research time to update their own knowledge, the reality is that only immediately available labour market information and knowledge may be used. Much good work has been undertaken on the development of LMI resources nationally, and progress has been made the *upskilling* of advisers. However, the use of labour market data within the constraints of day-to-day service delivery needs greater emphasis and resource.

### **3.2 Access and technology**

Information and communications technology (ICT) has emerged as a valuable medium for the delivery of career guidance. This is demonstrated by not only the established national Next Step on-line channel but also the plethora of private on-line providers and more recently the growth of social networking sites such as Horseshmouth.<sup>9</sup> However, it needs to be developed as one among a diverse range of approaches and not as a cheaper replacement for face-to-face and telephone services. With the potential availability via technology of a growing volume of information about careers, the focus of attention needs to be at least as much on how users can be best equipped to navigate this terrain as on how they access it.

Whilst technology has the potential to enhance the delivery of career guidance to some, it could also serve to exclude others if access to certain forms of technology becomes a prerequisite for accessing services. The IT and digital skills of those seeking careers guidance will need to be addressed if they are to make effective use of Web 2.0 and other technologies to manage their career development outside of contexts where they have the assistance of a professional adviser (e.g. at Next Step). It is also important not to assume that everyone – and in particular adults - can or will want to use IT and Web 2.0 technologies to manage a diverse and growing range of day-to-day interactions.

With this in mind, the importance of not only providing opportunities for people to develop their digital skills but also maintaining a diversity of approaches to the delivery of careers guidance is clear. Technology can provide one way to engage with the system but it is not a way that will work for everyone, especially at the critical point of entry. Meeting the needs of individuals is key, which means providing face to face support, or offering a combination of technological and face to face interventions.

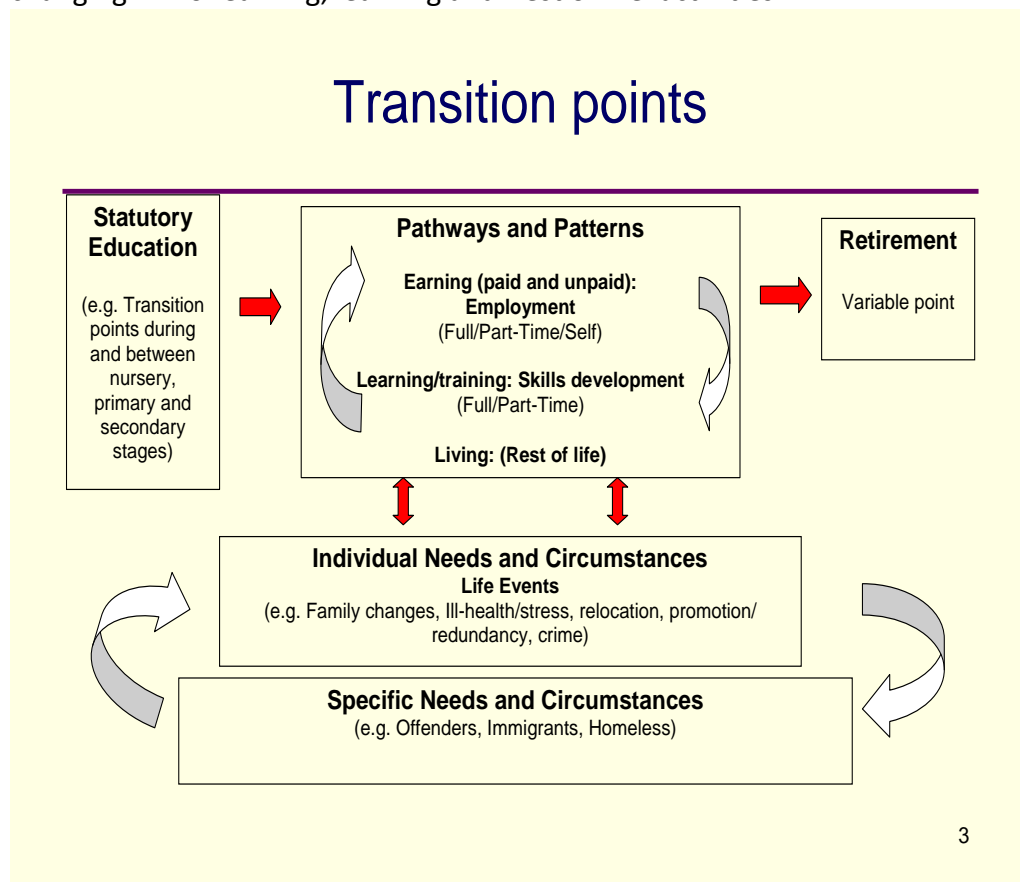
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<sup>9</sup> [www.horseshmouth.co.uk](http://www.horseshmouth.co.uk)

## 4. MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

### 4.1 Transition points

Transitions are a key element in the adult career guidance process. The diagram<sup>10</sup> below illustrates that while two fixed transition points can be identified that constitute a universal experience – i.e. the end of statutory education and retirement - individual career pathways and patterns between these points are highly variable, and are cyclical rather than linear. Current thinking suggests that on average people change their career<sup>11</sup> six to seven times throughout their lifetime, making *career choice and change a lifetime process*. Increasingly, people do not fall into easily defined categories as individual lives consist of a varied and changing mix of earning, learning and ‘rest of life’ activities.



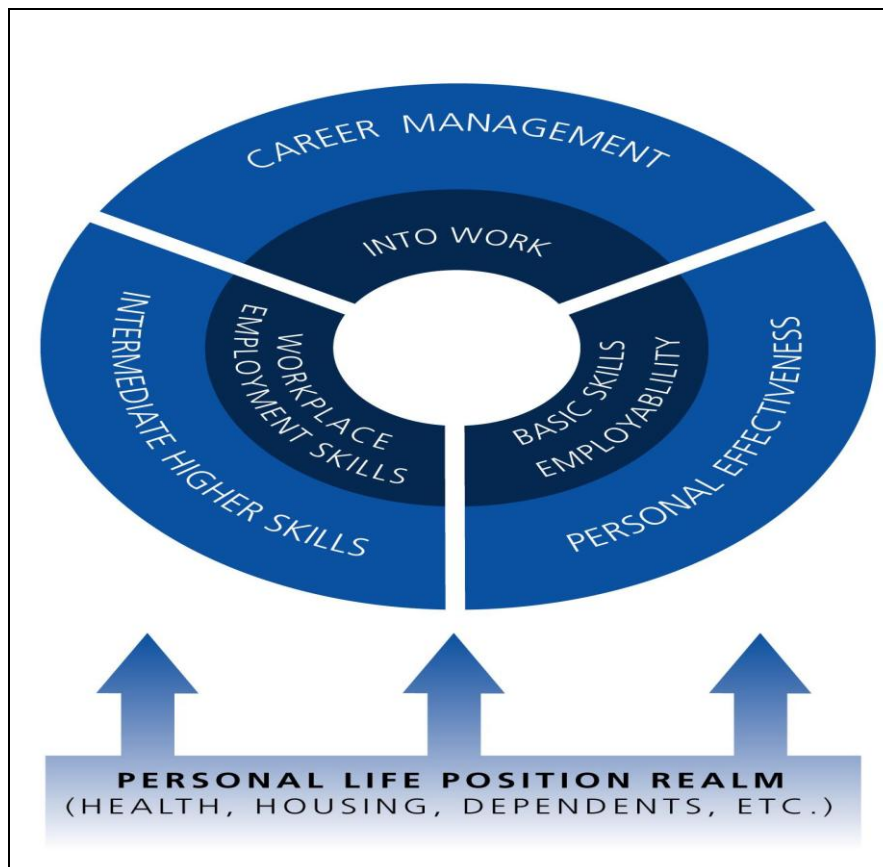
Specific needs, family circumstances or ill-health can trigger a transition, as can a desire to do something different, to earn more money, to improve prospects or to provide learning support for family (parents who feel the need to be able to help with children’s homework). Transitions can be positive or negative, and as such can be *enablers* or *disablers* to progression. Career guidance interventions provide the opportunity for individual adults to reflect and review their positions and explore options.

<sup>10</sup> Source of diagram, report on the *Cross government review of information, advice and guidance for adults, 2005-2007*

<sup>11</sup> Career in this sense refers to work and learning related activities in the broadest sense

## 4.2 Complexity and multiplicity of needs

The complexity and multiplicity of needs addressed through adult career guidance interventions cannot be underestimated. Presented needs frequently hide a multiplicity of other related issues and factors that have to be addressed before an individual can move forward. Some of these may be personal, financial or social, some may be about skills. In many cases they overlap and are interdependent<sup>12</sup>:



Many adults make a choice to seek career guidance services but, equally, many find themselves in front of an adult career guidance practitioner because of pressure applied by benefit regulations or even family and friends. In some cases adult career guidance practitioners are trying to encourage aspiration, advancement and progression; in others they are supporting and helping to realise it.

‘User competency’ – i.e. the ability of individuals to access guidance and use the results to support positive action – can be articulated in a number of different ways reflecting the

<sup>12</sup> Source of diagram, report on the *Cross government review of information, advice and guidance for adults, 2005-2007*

extent to which the individual is able to take responsibility for their own career development, e.g.<sup>13</sup>

- **Basic** – the individual has little knowledge or understanding of their needs and what they might need to address them.
- **Interpretative** – the individual can articulate their needs, has some understanding of what to do next but needs information or confirmation.
- **Discursive** – individuals have already taken some steps to address their needs and to discuss future actions and options further.

The Australian Blueprint for Career Development translates career development into a set of competencies that individuals need from childhood through to adulthood to effectively manage their careers. The eleven key competencies are:

#### Personal management

- Build and maintain a positive self-image
- Interact positively and effectively with others
- Change and grow throughout one's life

#### Learning and work exploration

- Participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals
- Locate and effectively use career information
- Understand the relationship between work and society/economy

#### Career building

- Secure/create and maintain work
- Make career enhancing decisions
- Maintain balanced life and work roles
- Understand the changing nature of life/work roles
- Understand, engage in and manage one's own life/work building process.

Many of the above competences fall into the 'soft'<sup>14</sup> outcomes of career guidance which if achieved can lead to greater autonomy and better decision-making for the individual in terms of 'hard'<sup>15</sup> outcomes. Very few of these competences can be achieved over night and may not be within the reach of all adults. Adult career guidance provides the opportunity for individuals to address transitional issues occurring as a result of critical incidents as well as look at longer term development.

No-one expects adult career guidance to provide a panacea in terms of supporting adults through change or development activities but it is very often the starting point. In some

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<sup>13</sup> Source: report of *Cross-government review of information, advice and guidance for adults, 2005-2007*

<sup>14</sup> About personal or social growth and development

<sup>15</sup> About specific achievement of work/jobs/sustainable employment.

cases this may simply involve confirmation or clarification of an existing idea or plan or seeking additional information. In others it may involve a much more in-depth process over a period of time, or multiple interventions at different times over a longer period.

Whatever the needs of the individual, adult career guidance interventions can only support and encourage advancement, aspiration progression if it is funded and structured to do so, and if the staff have the requisite skills and knowledge. While the adult careers service has been a very welcome development over the last few years, and NAEGA and NIACE are fully supportive of a National Careers Service the reality check is that many complex issues involve a complex infrastructure, time, resources, high quality staff supported by strong networks and partnerships. There are not short cuts.

## **5. DEVELOPING THE ADULT CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICE**

### **5.1 Economic instability and career patterns**

While labour markets have always been dynamic in nature, the instability and unpredictability of the current labour market creates challenges for both 'career planners' and 'career advisers'.

Government commitment is to reshaping the economy from one that relies on publicly funded services to one that relies more on the private sector with a focus on local decision-making and the development of the big society. Austerity measures put in place by Government to reduce the deficit and wider government reforms around the public sector mean that previously identified and understood career and employment routes are changing. Add to the mix rising unemployment (particularly among the under 25s) and an increase in part-time work and the challenge for adults making career decisions becomes apparent.

### **5.2 Balancing the needs of funders and individuals**

Successful and effective adult career guidance provision explores both 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. The over-riding goal of government funding is, however, the 'hard' outcomes of labour market engagement and, where possible, sustainable employment, goals which are reflected in both the targets and the resources applied to adult career guidance. While we feel these priorities are both reasonable and understandable we are concerned that the potential for individual *advancement* and the encouragement of *aspiration* is not overlooked.

When building and funding services government will never be able to provide an 'open cheque book', especially at a time of budgetary constraint. It is critical, however, that the need for hard outcomes is balanced against the achievement of the softer outcomes. If the balance swings too much in the direction of hard outcomes the result may well be the achievement of short-term gains in terms of the labour market but loss of the longer term benefits of a more empowered, aspirational and motivated workforce with higher level skills, with many adults be stuck in labour market 'churn' or jobs that provide no

opportunities for progression. Some job matching and job search is a key element of career guidance, but this is not the same thing as 'job placement'.

The reality of the more complexity of adult career guidance provision and the importance of soft outcomes can get lost in the immediate and explicit needs of wider government policy and austerity budgets. The needs of individual adults must be balanced against the requirements of the funders and wider government policy if real, longer-term outcomes are to be achieved. In order to achieve this it is our view that the following key principles should underpin the development of the National Careers Service:

- The aims of adult career guidance provision are:
  - Getting into work (and keeping the job)
  - Getting on at work, and
  - Getting more out of life
- Individual advancement, aspiration and progression (whether through learning or work) must be a goal.
- Soft outcomes are important factors in the achievement of hard outcomes – a factor which should be reflected in decision-making about the service offer and how it is resourced.
- LMI must translate into job realities; opportunities for progression should be a consideration when making labour market choices; LMI is a changing and evolving issue requiring a centrally resourced commitment to the regular upskilling and updating of front-line advisers.
- Adults present with a range of complex often inter-related needs and experience; desire and readiness for change or the need to upskill will be variable across a wide spectrum, a factor that needs to be recognised in service development.
- Services should be proactive, responsive and reactive to those with specific needs.
- Everyone should be encouraged to participate, regardless of age, gender, race, ability/disability, recognising that career progression for most people is cyclical not linear; career transitions throughout a life course are multiple and take many different forms.

Adult career guidance outcomes need to balance the needs and interests (short and longer-term) of the individual with the immediate requirements of economic and structural reform and the priorities of the government's social mobility agenda.

### **5.3 Building the architecture of a new service**

Building the architecture for the adult provision within a National Careers Service requires vision and ambition combined with a large dose of pragmatism and realism. It involves the definition of a national service delivery model that will ensure a consistent offer across the country at the same time as tailored provision at a local level. The service must effectively balance the needs of funders and the needs of service users and potential users, providing at a minimum:

- accessible and visible provision for all adults, as well as specific and targeted provision for priority groups;
- quality assurance arrangements that are recognised as a mark of trust by service users;
- access to telephone, web and face-to-face provision with effective links and signposting between them;
- high quality committed staff with consistent and regular CPD arrangements;
- support networks and partnership working
- positive relationships with Jobcentre Plus and other related government initiatives;
- adequate time and resources to deliver services;
- realistic targets
- marketing and promotion of services at both a national and a local level;

Much of the core offer is already in place through the current Next Step service. Areas where we would like to see further development are:

- Open-access, walk-in centres in ‘high street’ locations or equivalent.
- Recognition of the need to win ‘hearts and minds’ in the marketing and promotion of the adult career guidance service.
- Branding and logos that act as both a recognisable sign of provision but also a guarantee of quality for users.
- A statement of client entitlement – so users of services are clear what they can expect.
- Recognition of the increasingly complex and specialised skills required in the delivery of LMI through day-to-day service delivery.
- Time to bed in and become established (adult career guidance has been the subject of constant change and restructuring).
- Greater recognition of amount and speed of change currently facing the sector, and additional practitioner support to reflect this.
- Recognition of the possible impact of the crisis in young peoples’ provision on adult provision; young people under 19 may well present themselves to the adult face-to-face services in the absence of any other obvious viable alternatives.

#### **5.4 Professionalising the workforce**

A key element of the central government agenda for both young peoples’ and adult provision is the professionalisation of the workforce. The Careers Profession Alliance came together in 2010 as a partnership of the six leading professional bodies in the field career development in the UK<sup>16</sup>. Its executive group (comprising senior representatives of all six bodies) have been meeting on a voluntary basis for over a year to discuss ways of strengthening the profession, to improve services to clients/users (through such things as a sector Code of Ethics) and the professional standing of members across the whole of the UK.

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<sup>16</sup> Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG), Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), Association of Career Professionals International (ACPI), the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG), National Association for Guidance for Adults (NAEGA), Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges (NISCA).

The commitment is to an independent profession, acting in the interest of its clients, and not driven by the agendas of any government or other agency. The work has been underpinned by the report of the Careers Profession Task Force<sup>17</sup> in England and by the government's commitment to the development of 'a strong independent profession' to underpin the new National Careers Service in England. While the CPA is concerned only with the professional status of the careers sector it expects to work closely with employers of careers staff and government.

Some initial exploratory work has been undertaken under the auspices of funding from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. A consultation process is currently under way with all members of the bodies making up the CPA to obtain their views on the development of a single professional body. This consultation is due to be completed by September 2011.

NIACE and NAEGA welcome the move to a professional careers sector, which we feel is long overdue. We would like to make the following observations however:

- The government is enthusiastic and supportive of the development of the CPA, and views the professionalisation of the careers sector as an important element of its careers policy for both young people and adults. Whilst 'leaving it to the professionals' is a welcome development it must be noted that it should not be regarded as a replacement for government commitment to resourcing provision that is consistent (not variable) across the country and that meets minimum expectations with regard to quality and content.
- While the CPA is a major development for the careers sector workforce, and will raise the profile and independence of a 'career profession', it will still need to work in partnership with government when it comes to structural reform, changing priorities and related policy development. Professionalism is not a panacea in this regard. Government will still need to commit to providing additional resources if the sector is placed in a position where it has to implement, or reflect the implementation of, wider government reforms.
- Critically, for many years the sector has been concerned about the ability of anyone within the private sector to set themselves up as a 'careers adviser' or a 'career coach' with no requirement to meet any of the standards applied within publicly funded services, or even with the obligation of a qualification. While it was an expectation that this would be addressed through the development of a professional body, the current position is that the professional standards being developed under the CPA will only apply to the private sector if they choose to 'sign up', or if they are involved in public sector contracts, leaving some agencies and services still be able to deliver provision outside of publicly-funded contracts without meeting any minimum requirements.

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<sup>17</sup> *Towards a Stronger Careers Profession*, report of the Careers Profession Task Force, October 2010

- Government's enthusiasm for the CPA may need to be tempered with a recognition that the development of a full 'professional sector' will happen more in terms of years than months.
- Linked to the issue of development funding. Small amounts of funding are being provided on a project-by-project basis. If a speedy resolution to the development of the CPA is required funding will need to be more consistent and longer term.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Adult career guidance provision in England has grown exponentially since its inception in the 1980s as 'educational guidance for adults'. It is now a core part of the government's economic strategy and commitment to social mobility and through the telephone, face-to-face and web-based services provides a robust framework for access to a range of levels and types of career guidance provision.

This paper represents the joint views of NIACE and NAEGA on the current position with regard to adult careers service provision in England. It is not intended to set out a strategy or to present a complete detailed model of a future service. We are aware that as far as the adult service is concerned the framework is already largely in place. Neither is it meant to be critical or take a position that might be viewed as 'sniping from the sidelines'. It seeks to raise important issues that we think need to inform the development of the National Careers Service, in the absence of detailed information about the proposed model or arrangements. It also provides the basis for a debate within the learning and guidance sector about the new service which will inform NIACE and NAEGA's policy and advocacy work.

## **HOW TO JOIN THE DEBATE**

This paper is available to download from the NIACE and NAEGA websites. Comments and responses should be emailed to [guidance@niace.org.uk](mailto:guidance@niace.org.uk) by 29<sup>th</sup> July 2011. A short paper summarising this feedback and the ways in which it develops the arguments set out in this position paper will be prepared and published.