



## **The Careers Service: the Government's Elephant in the Room**

The government has underestimated the strength of opposition to their policies on the careers service. An overwhelming consensus led by UNISON and supported by key stakeholders, continues to demonstrate the vital role to the economy and young people provided by good, effective, independent careers advice and guidance.

The government in England finally issued updated Statutory Guidance on Careers Services in Schools this spring. It was 8 months overdue, and was only made available after schools had been trying to deliver the services by themselves for more than a year. The guidance is light touch and without penalties for non-compliance. The onus remains on how schools interpret and action the recommended guidance.

Research by the University of Derby and UNISON "A Careers Postcode Lottery" assessed the impact of the experiences of Local Authorities and their staff in dealing with policy changes arising from the Education Act 2011. The general picture revealed by this report is of a declining level of LA involvement in youth and career support and a consequent decline in the quality and quantity of the overall support available. In general, LAs have followed the direction of Government policy and facilitated the transfer of responsibilities to schools whilst focusing what resources they have on the provision of targeted services. Respondents were also clear that the policy changes were impacting negatively on young people. Many talked about the fact that young people were now making educational and employment decisions without support and noted that this was leading to unwise choices in many cases. In general, respondents echoed the criticisms about the declining scale and scope of careers work that have been made in other recent research reports. They also highlighted concerns about impartiality and observed downward pressures on the salaries and working conditions of careers workers within schools.

<http://www.derby.ac.uk/icegs/news/search-news/a-career-postcode-lottery>

In March 2014 UNISON published research on the impact the devolved duty to deliver careers guidance schools has had on the type of advice being provided. The lack of a central register or quality control has left the service open to the market; meaning just about anyone can sell their services to schools. The study revealed that 28% of schools were using their own staff to provide careers advice, and that in 36% of those schools it was teaching assistants and other support staff who were carrying out this work with little training. More than a third of support staff (38%) were delivering careers advice in addition to their normal duties.

A further UNISON survey in June 2014 revealed that cash-strapped schools were being forced to go with the lowest bidder to pay for careers guidance that was previously funded by the local authority. The lack of a central register or quality control has left the service open to the market; meaning just about anyone can sell their services to schools. Whilst support staff continued to deliver a service in 700 secondary schools in England, the research showed that pupils were increasingly likely to be abandoned with little, or no help, as a staggering 83% of schools surveyed were no longer employing a careers adviser. In the new culture many experienced careers advisers have been made redundant thereby leaving their specialist work, whilst others have begun selling their services as soul traders in

an unregulated market with little quality control. The lack of a central register has left the situation totally open, meaning that just about anyone can sell their services to schools. To counter criticism the Government continues to develop short term headline grabbing initiatives. Such as that emanating from the Deputy Prime Minister proposing a transfer of support for NEET 16 to 17 year olds to Job Centre Plus, with pilots throughout the country starting in the autumn. This is taking place at the same time experienced careers advisors in these areas are being made redundant.

Careers advice is far too important to be a political football. There is a significant policy deficit in careers education and guidance; the service had been left to wither on the vine. Young people deserve better. Good career guidance is critical if young people are to raise their aspirations and capitalise on the opportunities available to them. Changes in technology and in the labour market mean that increasing numbers of jobs require specific education and training. Key to this is access to good quality face to face guidance by fully qualified careers practitioners. UNISON is campaigning to strengthen the statutory duties and to seek amendments to the Education Act to make face to face guidance a mandatory provision and to reinstate the provision for schools to provide careers education which should commence at year 8.

### What factors would be part of a world class careers service?

- **Stability – in funding and type of provision.** There has been a considerable negative impact on the stability and integrity of the profession following the fragmentation of the careers guidance profession and the proliferation of the operation of sole traders;
- **Consistency** – in the quality and access to careers advice which is essential to avoid postcode lottery
- **Careers Education** to be provided at a stage early enough to make a difference
- **Accessibility** – available for people when they need it, where they need it and through a channel that works for them
- **Aspirational** – it should start in year 8 and be part of a life cycle – careers advice is relevant at every stage of life
- **Relevant – it should be responsive to economic and skills needs of the UK**
- **Impartial and Independent Advice** – to provide well informed IAG in schools and colleges without outside influence
- **Equitable National Pay Scales** Information, advice and guidance staffs require pay scales that are equivalent to comparable educational and social professions. It is time for a properly formulated national structure for salaries and conditions of service
- **Professionalisation** - Staff working in careers guidance need to have consistent qualifications which reflect the practical skills and theoretical knowledge required within their roles across the UK. Staff running the service should be part of a nationally recognised profession with agreed job descriptions, pay, and development

To find out more about our campaign contact Denise Bertuchi  
[education@unison.co.uk](mailto:education@unison.co.uk) and join our facebook campaign  
<https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/648467688510913/>

#### Three simple ways to join UNISON today:



Join online at  
[joinunison.org](http://joinunison.org)



Call us on  
0800 171 2193



Ask your UNISON rep  
for an application form

## **Model Letter**

**Include your contact details and local issues – use suggestions and the facts contained in the briefing.**

### **The Future of the Careers Service and Young People**

As you are my constituency MP I would like to draw your attention to concerns I have about the future of the Careers Service in this area. I would appreciate your support in highlighting my concerns at the highest level.

One of the biggest decisions a young person will ever make is choosing the right path to take so they can achieve the career they want. For many young people though, they are left to navigate the complicated world of qualifications, providers, further study or work options either alone or with minimal support. The UNISON campaign is calling for the Government to ensure that all young people have access to high quality careers advice on post-14 education, training and employment options.

In the current economic climate, an effective careers service has never been more important. Professional and tailored services are vital in improving social mobility and reducing inequality, helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds both raise their aspirations and fulfil their potential. It greatly concerns us that schools have been given the responsibility to provide careers advice but without the funding to deliver this. As a result research conducted by Careers England has shown that 8 out of 10 schools in England have reduced their careers advice. In one case, a school switched from 65 days of careers advice a year from the old Connexions Careers service to just 16 days of bought-in services.

The lack of a central register or quality control has left the service open to the market; meaning just about anyone can sell their services to schools. The study revealed that 28% of schools were using their own staff to provide careers advice, and that in 36% of those schools it was teaching assistants and other support staff who were carrying out this work with little training.

Since 2010 the area has seen significant cuts to the careers service availability for young people (details – include closures of Connexions Centres/job losses)

### **What you can do to help**

- I ask you to raise my concerns about the future of careers services with the Secretary of State for Education/Minister for Skills Matthew Hancock;
- To provide information of your party policy for the future of the careers service

- Highlight this issue at any suitable time in the House of Commons / Lords, or directly with Ministers in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, for example through a Westminster Hall debate or departmental questions
- Come and meet me (And colleagues) in **(insert)** and learn more about my/our concerns for the future of the careers service.

I hope you recognise my concerns and seek answers from the relevant ministers responsible. Please do get in touch if you would like any further information or would like to meet to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely