

The Future for Adult Guidance

This is a note of the participant input at this NICEC Network event on 18th September 2023.

It is based on feedback from small group discussions, points made in the Chat bar during the session and some comments sent by email after the event.

A full description of the event and the materials used, plus a video of the session with the Q&A discussion can be found at:

<https://www.nicec.org/events/the-future-for-adult-guidance->

Small groups were asked to discuss:

1: What would you suggest as practical and sustainable directions for improving career support services for adults in the UK?

2: What should we learn from different approaches and practices adopted over time in different parts of the UK and in other countries?

Feedback from the discussion groups typed into the Chat:

Each room that fed back in the Chat is in a separate bulleted list below separated by a dotted line.

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- We talked about people in employment having access to careers support and the previous role of union learn.
- How can there be greater alignment between careers and skills policy and what are the challenges with this?
- Some good examples including the individual online support from Careers Wales.

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- We talked about employers and why they engage with employment/careers services – often because of problems with talent management.
- We also reflected on how to harmonise the system and bring together the different parts. The value of quality systems and professionalisation was highlighted here.
- Finally we reflected on what good practice looks like and highlighted some key features like listening to the clients, developing their career management skills and confidence and making good use of labour market information.

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- The NCS model seems to have got lost but can work well e.g. Careers Wales
- What about the ageing population? Surely this should be a factor going forward.
- Specialist provision by specialist providers seems important also - certain groups may not access a mainstream service
- Co-location of related services and a one stop shop for individuals can work well. For example, is the distinction between employability and careers support necessary? Could these not coexist well?
- Regionally informed services also are important.
- How do individuals get to know about any offer of guidance which is available?

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- We had a mix of experience in the group - adult guidance, HE guidance, apprenticeships, school careers leader training, work coaches in the civil service.
- Key issues include the fragmentation of services, the quality of provision (and funding for the time needed for this) and the lack of professional training
- We would like to see a common vision – to agree on what we want people to be able to access to join the workforce and contribute value to the economy.
- Need a common framework for knowledge skills and behaviours needed from the professionals delivering this (we have several but can't seem to agree!)
- Provision is patchy and doesn't encompass all areas – e.g. we miss out on areas such as out-placement advice and what is happening inside organisations
- We are relatively rich in data (who is employed, who isn't, skills needed in the local area etc) but it seems there is an absence of the vision to act on this.

- We talked about having a lifelong careers/education service and what that might look like to support transition, change, development, different life stages, new learning etc

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- Separate the Employability agenda from the Career agenda
- Widen the reach of career services and switch the focus from “cost” to “investment.”
- Layers / levels of intervention for a/ Those needing limited help to find resources. b/ Help for people to understand their career needs c/ Those with barriers to work who will need specialist help . We thought that this would need well educated and resourced career professionals to assess and triage this need in integrated services.
- Further marketing/ branding of career services (like the early NCS online provision) Further navigation resources for career service users.
- We also identified the importance of social networks and network development as part of career development.
- Integration of services was a key focus, which we all agreed with

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- The million-dollar question is how we get to an embedded approach within a system, with appropriate resources, integrated with key actors (including government, employers, employee bodies etc)
- We need to manage subcontractors well, with a robust QA approach to encourage positive outcomes. This leads to thoughts around level of service provision that is meaningful, payment that is supportive and not minimum wage for practitioners
- It is important to distinguish advice, information and guidance and to consider the relevant qualifications required for different kinds of activities
- The Netherlands patchwork approach is like ours and stands out. In addition, it would be beneficial to integrate the system and include different actors to support an integrated approach including - unions, not for profit, executives within government, service providers, employers... In essence emulate the Nordic social contract system

Other comments and issues raised in the Chat:

- On the macro system... the machinery of government... I'm curious also about how to stitch things together... the article referenced below is about HE/FE funding. It raises interesting questions about how we link together education, skills and training, the needs of the labour market, industrial strategy etc... as a systems-wide endeavour rather than a bun fight for funding.
<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/why-labour-should-prioritise-tertiary-reform-over-tuition-fees/>
- Government is working with health services to provide careers support, for example through Employment Advisers in the NHS Talking Therapies programme
- Not having a secret NCS would be a great start on marketing!
- It is difficult to find out when things stop, e.g. the decommissioning of youth hubs, the LEPs coming to an end next year. Providing up to date support / signposting becomes increasingly difficult.
- It would be helpful to separate benefits/sanctions management from employability/careers advice. This point was reinforced in discussion by Tony Wilson. Tristram Hooley pointed out that the linkage of benefits to the employment service as practised in England, which we have become so used to, is unusual in other European countries.
- I was interested in what Tristram said about adult guidance being more complex than when working with young people. I think there are implications for career development training. We continue to need well-rounded, holistic practitioners who can fit into the system, whatever that is. Are there implications for training and developing practitioners' confidence to be able to deal with clients at all ages?
- There was strong interest in the topic of career guidance for older adults, including the provision of some kind of mid-life review or 'career MOT':
 - Careers Wales is piloting the mid career review – and beginning to think about Careers Reviews at all ages, not just mid-life (45-60)
 - Aviva and some other companies (L&G?) are also active in this area
 - Suggestions that one should be able to ask for a career MOT at any time. Not sure that fixed ages will work as well as being able to respond to the individual's need for a rethink when life/work events change their circumstances.

NIACE report on pilots of the midlife career review -

<https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mid-life-career-review-2/>

AVIVA description and link to open access app

<https://www.aviva.co.uk/business/business-perspectives/featured-articles-hub/prepare-employees-for-better-retirement/>

- There was also significant interest in supporting the transition to retirement. Both participants and speakers highlighted previous research on this and that people approaching retirement age and well beyond it may still want to work but may have different employment drivers from younger adults.

Further comments sent by a NICEC Fellow after the event

- Purpose 1: Government funded services are often just seen as costs to the taxpayer, but I think they should be seen as investments in people which will have benefits both for the individual and society. This applies to the NHS, education, etc as much as to career guidance services.
- Purpose 2: Development as freedom (Sen, 1999) reminds us that without development opportunities people's lives are limited. This is rather like the IES model of the career development continuum - if you are in the 'job for now' category there are very limited (if any) opportunities for development and yet this is what the UK Employment Service with its "get a job, any job" approach seems to emphasise.
- Time: My survey of people working in adult guidance found that guidance workers in the public sector spent much less time with clients than those working in the private sector. Nelson Bolles always used to stress the need for both time and research in developing a career plan and that it is the quality of a good and thought-through job application that makes an impression and not the number of applications. There are many stories of employers saying people don't turn up for interviews. The implication is that lots of job applications are being made just to meet Employment Service targets.
- Quality: This will be an important issue and using models to direct clients to the most appropriate support will be critical. Some will just need information; others will need much more.
- Information on specialised labour markets: Most people are looking for jobs in particular employment areas and these labour markets work in distinctive ways that people need to understand to improve their chances of getting employment.

- Development and training: The outcome of many career interventions is the need for development opportunities or specific training to meet a career objective and this needs to be factored in when guidance services are developed.

Other materials and contact details

Phoenix's campaign: <https://careerschange.co.uk/>

To keep in touch with Gatsby work on adult guidance contact adultcareersguidance@gatsby.org.uk

To contact the Commission on the Future of Employment Support at IES you can email commission@employment-studies.co.uk.