

STEP CHANGE?

Next Steps is the policy response to the consultation on *Youth Matters*.

This is Bill's response to the response.

There will be no white paper to follow the *Youth Matters* green paper. Instead we are being shown the *Next Steps* - published on 8th March.

And this later statement doesn't mention careers education any more frequently than the earlier one. Policy is still not interested in applauding what we have been doing, it is looking for a reform.

But there are some of shifts in emphasis. One is about how Connexions is to be eased - step-by-step - into local-authority control. The other shift might be easier to miss: there is more detail on programme development. *Next Steps* gives several paragraphs to how children's trusts will manage that process - moving from identifying learning needs to designing services.

Bill points to how reforming careers coordinators can help children's trusts with this work:

- > by drawing on their own *programme*- as well as organisation-management abilities;
- > by linking learning to a *wider range* of expertise and experience; and
- > by engaging the *dynamics* as well as the structures of provision.

There are no 'giant leaps' to be made here. But there is a basis for sustainable, useful and effective reform.

Next Steps (1) offers a big challenge to school-and-college-based careers coordinators. What it proposes will rely on coordinators more than its authors seem yet to understand.

The issue is programme management. For example, take the paper's repeated formula for what the trusts will offer young men and women:

'something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to'.

Okay, as far as it goes; but a good learning-programme manager will take it farther:

'places worth exploring, people who can really help, tasks that will get you involved'.

Without that kind of thinking, all we would be doing is trying to keep kids off the streets. Babysitting!

Pretty obvious, isn't it? Obvious to you maybe. But there are several paragraphs in the paper about how local-authority children's trusts will commission work and, themselves, design programmes. And they're going to need a lot of help on what kinds of programmes will offer young men and women a real expansion of their life chances. The trusts can get this kind of help in a number of ways; but some of the most significant will be in schools and

colleges. And some of the most experienced managers of the kinds of programmes required will be careers coordinators.

standpoints for management. Programme management is not like organisation management. Organisational managers know about hiring and firing, attracting funding, maintaining budgets, organising logistics and getting value-for-money accountability. Good thing too.

But programme management does more. It means understanding learning needs, drawing on appropriate resources, setting up effective processes so that useful outcomes are reached. It's a different system; and it needs to be understood, set up and engaged from a different standpoint.

You'd think that would be enough; but it won't. Programme management for *Youth Matters* and *Next Steps* is integrative management:

- > it **links across organisational boundaries**;
- > its team is more like a **network** than a department;
- > it works with **voluntary** as well as specialist help.

'Integration' crops up a lot in *Youth Matters* and *Next Steps*. It gets a lot of mentions in our courses and conferences - and it certainly needs some serious rethinking. Tony Watts (2) makes a distinction between vertical and lateral integration. It provides what could be a useful basis for mapping what we do to help children's trusts.

integrating upward and onward. Vertical integration has up-and-down links, linking people with a shared focus on career development. Vertical integration puts careers workers in schools and colleges in close touch with Connexions companies, in what is called the 'partnership model'. It is strong in Scotland and Wales, where it links career-specialists together in a 'core structure'. And the structure gives a tight focus of attention: for the delivery of a well-defined programme, for research and development, and for the upward extension of the service into a life-long provision. Nothing wrong with this.

Lateral integration links out, calling on a wider range of expertise. Programme managers work with members of other departments in the organisation and with experts in other fields in the community. And they call on voluntary experience as well as professional expertise (3).

All of this means that students can see what they do about careers in the context of what they do in their lives as consumers, householders, partners, parents, neighbours and citizens. It causes careers coordinators to be just as concerned with work-life balance as with employability. Nothing wrong with this either; and it is what *Youth Matters* is about.

There is no contradiction between vertical and lateral integration: lateral integration does not negate the partnership model, it expands it. We are going to find - and not just in England - that the one integrative strategy will not work without the other.

so, what kind of manager? Management is not one thing. Careers coordinators have some organisational management to do - managing budgets, logistics, funding streams and the like. David Andrews and Anthony Barnes (4) map the range of tasks in terms which

suggest a basis for developing a management team. More recently David Andrews' (5) enquiry suggests how professionals-other-than-teachers can provide some of those management abilities for careers work.

But the team needs both organisation- and programme-management abilities. And *Youth Matters* needs that support across the whole of the personal-and-social development in the curriculum. (Maybe that's why free-standing careers education doesn't get much of a mention - not in *Youth Matters* nor in *Next Steps*.)

So, in careers work, management really is not one thing. We mustn't forget organisation management, but we need to think hard about programme management; and, then, there is laterally-integrated programme management. And managing lateral integration is not programme management in any conventional school-or-college-based sense. It reaches way beyond what most heads of department do. But it is bread-and-butter to the people I characterised - long ago - as 'reforming careers coordinators' (6).

We'll need to find this kind of management close to the school or college. In the first place learning needs really do need to be understood at neighbourhood level and schools are being encouraged to develop closer relationships with their catchment areas. But, in the second place, whatever the trusts do to commission and design programmes, schools and colleges will be significant sources of learning help in that network.

All of this locates careers coordinators at the centre of a new dynamics for programme development.

structures and dynamics. *Youth Matters* and *Next Steps* are policy papers; and policy is aspirational. It is about hope:

*'where are we going?',
'why is that such a good idea?', and
'how will we know when we've got there?'*

But no team, however able, can manage programmes solely on the basis of aspirations: you need to know how things work. That's why we have never found a straight line from policy to realisation. And why we never will.

Policy people think a lot about structures that give us the best chance of realising hope. But they do not always think enough about the dynamics. We don't really know what structures will do until people start operating them. (Current proposals for school admission structures suffer from the same lack of insight into what people will actually do with them.) The way people use structures has its own dynamics. When it comes to *Youth Matters* and *Next Steps* the usefulness of the structures will be largely shaped by the sense that young men and women make of them. Between them, students and providers will animate structure into programme. And, on our side of that dynamic, progress in learning won't come from the manipulation of organisational budgets and systems of accountability. Programme managers need to know how learning works. And integrated programme management requires that they know how people learn both from expertise and experience.

To be fair, *Youth Matters* kind-of admits this. Its subtext is an acknowledgement of the limits of centrally-designed structures. It repeatedly says that reform depends on what local people

do. It also repeatedly points to the usefulness of community links. The green paper actively encourages local variation - local people working out what they can do to make reforms work.

However, *Next Steps* doesn't mention schools and colleges with any wider understanding of what they can do. It's a serious blind spot. That's the challenge to school-or-college-based programme managers. We must step up and show them.

There was a time when people would dream of a 'step change' - one giant leap for careers-education-and-guidance. It never happened, and it won't. Compared to child's play, rocket science is child's play. But there is a basis in the *Youth-Matters-Next-Steps* proposals for sustainable, useful and effective reform. And - learning being as layered, dynamic and complicated as it is - we are going occasionally to trip up, wander into blind alleys, and be forced to retrace some of our steps. The people who will know when that is happening, and what to do about it, will be reforming careers coordinators.

(1) The government paper [Next Steps](#) [ed: now archived]

(2) Tony Watts' paper: 'Devolution and diversification; career guidance in the home countries' is in the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 34 (1) 2006

(3) Bill's work on [Learning from Experience](#) [BL14]

(4) David Andrews' and Anthony Barnes' briefing: [Leading and Managing Careers Work in Schools - the Changing Role of the Careers Coordinator](#) [NICEC Briefing]

(5) David Andrews' research report [Careers Coordinators and Workforce Remodelling](#)

(6) Bill's earlier work on [The Reforming Careers Coordinator](#) [BL04]