The new statutory requirements in careers guidance in England and the implications for careers provision under the Coalition Government

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The Education Act 2011 passed responsibility for careers guidance in England from local authorities to schools, providing no extra funding or staff training. This paper reports on a project conducted in two schools in East London, which aimed to enhance careers work in response to the new requirements. It argues that whilst schools can enhance their careers programme, the new arrangements have left them with requirements they do not have the funding, expertise, or networks to fulfil. This move by the Coalition Government is contributing to a process of deterioration of careers provision in England, involving the undermining of the careers profession and the diminishing of professionalism in careers provision.

Keywords: careers work; secondary education in England; years 7–9; action research

Introduction

The Education Act 2011 handed over responsibility to provide Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) in England to schools. In the past, CEIAG, or careers work, was the responsibility of local authority funded careers services and, from 2001–11, of Connexions, the holistic support service whose remit was to provide all kinds of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to young people. Funds have now been completely withdrawn from Connexions, and schools have been provided with the vaguest of guidelines, and no extra funds to fulfil the new requirements. This paper reports on an action research project conducted in two schools in East London, which aimed to enhance careers work for years 7–9 in the context of the new requirements. It argues that whilst there is much that schools can do to enhance their school-based careers programme, the new arrangements have left them with requirements for which they do not have the funding, experience, expertise, or networks to fulfil. This move by the Coalition Government is contributing to a process of deterioration of careers provision in England, which began with the Connexions service, and involves the undermining of the careers profession and the diminishing of professionalism in careers provision.

There is no agreement in the field of careers work about exact definitions. 'Careers guidance' is often used as an umbrella term for CEIAG or careers work 'including career learning in the curriculum, employer engagement and work experience as well as one-to-one advice and guidance' (Hooley *et al.*, 2014: 5). In this paper, for purposes of clarity, I use 'careers work' as an umbrella term and otherwise, the current government definitions as follows:

> Careers education is the delivery of learning as part of the curriculum. Careers education is often closely related to work-experience and other forms of work-related learning. Work-related

learning is the provision of opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of work and to develop skills for employability through direct experiences of work. Careers guidance is a deeper intervention in which an individual's skills, attributes and interests are explored in relation to their career options. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013: 8)

Connexions and the diminishing of the careers profession

Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, careers provision in England for young people was identified as among the best in the world (Roberts, 2013: 240). This started to change, initially with the introduction of the Connexions service in 2001. Intended to be a holistic service providing advice and guidance in all areas of young people's lives, it incorporated all local careers services as well as representatives from other youth support services. However, whilst the other services retained separate, discrete services, as well as having representatives working for Connexions, this was not the case with careers services, leaving England without a national organization with a careers remit (Lewin and Colley, 2011). Connexions was innovatively supposed to provide both specialist IAG (careers guidance) and universal IAG, related to other life issues. In the context of increased attention on social inclusion at that time, it was designed specifically to focus particularly on the most disadvantaged, as well as providing careers guidance for all. However, as an organization it was under-resourced, meaning that staff were unable to provide both specialist and universal IAG, and it actually focused on young people 'at risk' of exclusion at the expense of careers guidance for all.

In fact, higher achievers in many schools were not provided with a guidance interview at all (McGowan *et al.*, 2009; Lewin and Colley, 2011). The single agency created a new profession of Personal Advisers (PAs) – drawn from a variety of youth welfare service backgrounds – whose roles, however, were not clearly defined and it was unclear whether they were supposed to be providing specialist or general IAG. Careers professionals were therefore no longer designated careers advisers (Lewin and Colley, 2011; Hooley *et al.*, 2014). It became unclear what counted as a professional qualification in careers work, and what constituted the knowledge base of the profession (McGowan *et al.*, 2009; Lewin and Colley, 2011: 3). A report conducted by Lifelong Learning UK found that qualifications within the sector had fallen considerably between 2004 and 2009 (Neary *et al.*, 2014). In addition, there was no agreement on job titles, with 43 different titles used to describe individuals working in careers guidance. Connexions was thus disastrous for the careers profession, resulting in the loss of professional identity for practitioners (McGowan *et al.*, 2009), and the erosion of a distinctive careers profession with its own knowledge base and qualifications (Watts, 2001; Lewin and Colley, 2011: 2; Hooley *et al.*, 2014).

Whilst moving towards the establishment of so-called 'Integrated Youth Support Services', budgets were transferred to local authorities in 2008, although these were not ring-fenced (McGowan *et al.*, 2009). There was large variation regionally in response to this move, with local authorities either taking provision in-house, continuing to fund a Connexions service, or contracting out to other providers. This led to equally variable results in terms of funding of IAG services and standards of provision. Careers provision, when the Coalition Government came to power in 2010, was thus neither nationally consistent, nor coherent.

Changes under the Coalition Government: A mixed economy of careers provision

In the context of the Coalition Government's focus on school autonomy and a marketized approach to education, the Education Act 2011 handed over responsibility for careers work in

England from local authorities to schools, coming into force from September 2012. A slightly revised version of the guidance appeared in 2014, and schools are now required to provide careers guidance from year 8 (12–13 year olds) to year 13 (17–18 year olds) (DfE, 2014a; 2014b).[1] All funding has been withdrawn from Connexions and schools have not been given any extra funding for careers provision. The wider implications of this transfer of responsibility, the new statutory guidance, and the loss of funding are extensive. From the 1970s until 2011, careers work had been delivered via a partnership between external services and schools; schools are now solely responsible for the delivery (Hooley *et al.*, 2014). Most social commentators, including the House of Commons Education Committee (2013), have been highly critical of the new arrangements, and international evidence from New Zealand and the Netherlands suggests that a school-based model of careers guidance risks significant deterioration in provision (Hooley *et al.*, 2012; Watts, 2013). Whilst little empirical research has as yet been conducted on the new arrangements, what has been carried out suggests that careers provision has deteriorated further (Hooley *et al.*, 2014).

It can be argued that the statutory and non-statutory guidelines continue to undermine and diminish both the careers profession and professionalism in careers provision. Indeed, some have argued that the continued diminishing of careers work as a profession is an ideological move on the part of the Coalition Government, in line with wider moves to diminish professionalism in the public sector, such as the creation of opportunities for teachers to teach without a qualification or in higher education (Hooley *et al.*, 2014).

The guidelines do not draw on the work of quality assurance bodies and guidelines such as the Career Development Institute and the Quality in Careers Standard (Watts, 2014b); rather, the government's educational auditing body, Ofsted, without careers specialisms, has been tasked with providing quality assurance (DfE, 2014b). Schools are also advised to refer to their own student Destination Measures Data, published by the Department for Education, to assess how successfully their pupils make transitions into the next stage of education, or training, or into employment (DfE, 2014b: 6) – although as Watts (2014b) points out, this data only records initial destinations of students, not whether the destination was suitable and matched their interests, as a good careers programme would.

Moreover, the work of careers professionals is virtually unmentioned in the guidelines (Watts, 2014a; 2014b). Indeed, schools are not required to employ qualified careers advisers, or use only matrix accredited organizations (Andrews, 2013: 1), although there is evidence to suggest that less than a third of school careers coordinators have formal qualifications in careers work, and that this percentage is decreasing (McCrone *et al.*, 2009: 11). Although schools are required to provide 'impartial' guidance, 'defined as showing no bias or favouritism towards a particular education or work option' (DfE, 2014b: 7), as Watts (2014b) argues, it seems that what is being referred to by 'impartial' is not 'access to a single impartial source', but rather a 'range of partial sources' (p.3). Thus the guidance suggests that schools can fulfil this duty by providing access to a range of employers or representatives from different further or higher education institutions, rather than access to an external, professional careers adviser. Moreover, other research shows school-based systems inevitably lack impartiality (Watts, 2013: 447). For example, schools that have their own sixth forms may be unlikely to be able to provide impartial guidance on wider post-16 options, as they have financial incentives to compete for students against other local institutions. There is also a requirement for schools to provide 'independent' careers guidance 'defined as external to the school' (DfE, 2014b: 7). Only the non-statutory guidelines mention that this 'should include face-to-face support where needed' (DfE, 2014a: 20); therefore, this could potentially be interpreted simply as access to a website or telephone

helpline, and even if face-to-face guidance is provided, there is no mention that this should be with a qualified or professional careers adviser.

Rather than the provision of expert careers work, the guidelines focus on employer engagement in schools (DfE, 2014b). This is despite international evidence suggesting that school-based guidance systems tend to have weak links to the labour market (Watts, 2013: 447; Bimrose *et al.*, 2014), and that Education Business Partnerships, which provide a bridging service between schools and business and industry, have had their funding cut by many councils (Hughes *et al.*, 2015). In addition, whilst shifting the responsibility for careers guidance to schools, the previous statutory requirement of schools to provide careers education and work-related learning have disappeared altogether, disregarding the wealth of evidence which shows that careers work is most effective as part of a coherent programme of curriculum-integrated careers education (see e.g. Watts, 2014b).

Lastly, as schools have not been provided with funding to fulfil this new duty, it is unclear what resources they will allocate (Hooley and Watts, 2011: ii), particularly as this shifts even more work to already busy schools (Hooley *et al.*, 2012: 28). The quality of CEIAG received by young people now depends on schools rather than specialized services (ibid.), and as Watts (2013: 447) points out, schools tend to view educational choices as ends in themselves, rather than as the career choices they actually are.

A new, government-funded, National Careers Service (NCS) has been set up to provide guidance; however, young people only have access to telephone and online services, with face-to-face guidance reserved for adults (Hooley and Watts, 2011). In a recent review, Ofsted (2013) reported that most teachers and students found the website too adult-focused to be useful. Research conducted in Scotland on the impact of the two main Scottish career websites on pupils' career management skills found that these websites had little or no impact among those who used them (Howieson and Semple, 2013: 287). The remit of the NCS has recently (October 2014) been expanded to include a brokerage role between schools and employers; however, this role remains as yet relatively undeveloped (Bimrose *et al.*, 2014). In December 2014, it was announced that the government was creating a new careers and enterprise company, also in order to provide a brokerage service between employers and schools, and to 'ensure employers are supporting young people with decision-making and career development at every stage of school life' (DfE, 2014c). Again, however, there is no mention of professional guidance, and it is assumed that employers will be able to provide young people with the information about routes into education, training, and work.

Local authorities have responded to this shift in responsibility for CEIAG in a number of ways. The majority have reduced their funding for, and the number of staff in, youth and career support since the election of the Coalition Government. About a third has remained involved in the delivery of career support (Langley *et al.*, 2014: v). A market in careers work is opening up, with competition between multiple external providers and products, and many newcomers (Bimrose *et al.*, 2011; Hooley *et al.*, 2012; Hughes, 2013b: 229). Initial observations indicate that the fact that there are so many providers in the field is creating much confusion (Hughes, 2013b: 230). There is no way for schools to check staff qualifications, or what kind of service is being offered – a situation which can equally be said to be threatening the professionalism of careers provision (Hughes, 2013a). Schools are responding with a number of models, including commissioning from a private provider, from the local authority, from a local college, or arranging for a member of staff to provide provision in-house (London Councils, 2013: 14) – or indeed, a combination of these.

This study

This paper reports on a ten-month study conducted in two schools, in different boroughs in East London, in the school year 2013/14. The main aim was to develop and test ways of enhancing school-based CEIAG for pre-GCSE pupils, in order to support the schools in addressing the new statutory requirements. We focused on years 7–9, as evidence shows careers work is more beneficial the earlier it begins (e.g. Morgan *et al.*, 2007).

East London was considered to be a particularly interesting region to conduct such research. Young people growing up in London face a unique situation with implications for delivering careers work (London Councils, 2013), perhaps in East London especially. Despite a national economic downturn, urban regeneration is providing improved opportunities in some parts of the country and this includes East London. For example, it is predicted that thousands of new jobs will be created in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The website states, '[i]n total more than 20,000 jobs could be created by the Park by 2030, including spin-offs in the local economy' (Mayor of London, 2014). London as a whole has more options and opportunities in work and training than the rest of the country (London Councils, 2013). However, London has the highest youth unemployment in the country, at 20.7 per cent, not counting students in full-time education (London Councils, 2013); unemployment rates in Barking and Dagenham (9.5 per cent), Newham (9.5 per cent), Tower Hamlets (8.5 per cent), and Waltham Forest (8.2 per cent) are among the highest in the country (Trust for London, 2014). London also has an international workforce with an older age profile, meaning the labour market is extremely competitive (London Councils, 2013).

The project aims were to:

- map the current CEIAG infrastructure for young people in two case study schools;
- raise awareness in the two schools of the importance of effective CEAIG;
- pilot models of school-based CEIAG for years 7–9, to provide context to young people's transitions and broaden young people's aspirational horizons.

This was therefore a traditional action research project (Somekh, 2006) in three stages:

- At stage 1, CEIAG provision for the two case schools was mapped and gaps identified. In each school, the researchers worked with the head teacher, school careers coordinator, selected subject teachers, local careers advisers, selected young people, and local employers' networks to develop potential alternative CEIAG models to address gaps, which build on and enhance current practice.
- At stage 2 we tested some preferred models through delivery in the case schools.
- At stage 3 we evaluated the success of the different models through interviews and focus groups with staff and pupils.

A sample group of young people from each school was tracked throughout the project to record experiences and perceptions of CEIAG. There were eight participants in each of years 7–9. We focused on the middle-attainment group, as studies highlight their particular difficulties as being one of the groups most in need of CEIAG, because of the potentially wide range of academic and vocational options open to them, but also because they are least likely to receive adequate support (Colley *et al.*, 2010), being '"overlooked" by policy' (Hodgson and Spours, 2014). Young people were selected according to their predicted GCSE grades; middle-attainers were considered those likely to gain four to seven GCSEs (A*–C). Throughout, qualitative data was gathered through observations (attending events such as assemblies and options evenings), and formal data was supplemented by data gathered from informal conversations with staff and pupils. All data has been anonymized. The schools were explicitly encouraged to take ownership

of the strategy and outcomes, in order to work towards sustainable school-based CEIAG once the project finished.

Several schools were contacted through the local authority and invited to take part in the study; the two schools selected were the first to volunteer.

School 1 is a single-sex girls' school with a sixth form in an area of high deprivation and with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

School 2 is a mixed 11–16 school in a deprived area with a large number of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Analysis

Careers provision at the schools was analysed following Hooley *et al.* (2014: 5), who identify four categories:

- Infrastructure: including leadership, staff coordination and delivery, and systematic record-keeping.
- Programmes: a structured career education programme from year 7 or 8.
- Stakeholders: opportunities to engage with employers and post-secondary learning providers.
- Individual: an entitlement to see a careers adviser and a range of informal career conversations.

We also drew on the recommendations of the recently published Gatsby Report (2014) on good careers guidance, which the authors argue should include:

- a stable careers programme;
- learning from career and labour market information;
- addressing the needs of each pupil;
- linking curriculum learning to careers;
- encounters with employers and employees;
- experiences of workplaces;
- encounters with further and higher education;
- personal guidance.

Findings

Stage 1

Infrastructure

At School 1, CEIAG was coordinated by a member of the senior leadership team (SLT), who directly supported and monitored a full-time careers coordinator. Careers was regarded as a priority and 'a new agenda to widen horizons and create aspirations' (assistant head, School 1) had been introduced the previous academic year. At School 2, however, CEIAG was officially led by a member of the SLT but was not regarded as a priority, and the careers coordinator had little support:

> Senior staff are aware of their duty to provide impartial CG, however, they have no idea how to go about it in practice. (Careers coordinator, School 2)

Both schools had employed new careers coordinators within months of the project starting. School 1 employed a full-time careers coordinator who was a former careers adviser, and had formal careers training. At School 2, the careers coordinator had no formal careers training. She was employed on a part-time basis and was a member of the support staff, with correspondingly low standing.

Teachers, however, were in general not yet on board with the careers agenda in either school. There was little awareness among teachers in either school that CEIAG has moved into schools. Although some individual teachers were keen to enhance CEIAG, some felt that careers work simply adds to an unrealistically long list for teachers:

> Teachers have too much to do, the list of what we have to do is constantly being added to and we can't squeeze in something extra. (Creative Arts teacher, School 2)

> There's no time to focus on careers. There's too much accountability and focus on exams. (Performing Arts teacher, School 1)

Most teachers interviewed did not see careers as a potentially joined-up effort across all subjects, and some did not see it as something they could contribute to. Wider employability skills were not explicitly recognized as such by some.

Neither school had kept centralized records on pupil destinations, aspirations, and guidance. School data in both schools had been kept in various different places, and not used to inform the CEIAG programme. In School 2, which is an 11–16 school, it was particularly difficult to gather destination data. Arrangements were in place with two local colleges, but this only covered about 50 per cent of school leavers:

> I don't know whether centralized records are kept, and I don't check them. There's no monitoring of this. (Head teacher, School 2)

Programmes

In both schools, explicit careers work focused on year 11, with some work in year 10, and the sixth form in School 2. Despite the fact that schools are required to provide careers guidance for all pupils from year 8, there was little provision for younger pupils in either school, except for 'options' events for year 9 (to help pupils choose optional subjects for their compulsory GCSE exams). Some staff members were already doing relevant and effective careers-related work in their own individual lessons; however, this was largely uncoordinated and in general, links were not made between curriculum subjects and potential careers/future opportunities for years 7–9:

> In relation to careers guidance we at present provide very little. (Humanities teacher, School 1)

> More could be done for careers. At the moment it's done individually but it's not formalized. Kids learn about careers without knowing they're learning about careers. (Maths teacher, School 2)

> Careers happens incidentally or by accident if it happens at all. (Creative Arts teacher, School 2)

For year 11s in both schools, careers work involved one-to-one guidance interviews, work experience placements, and one-off visits to career fairs and universities for small groups. Year 7–9 pupils reported that they could remember having done none, or very little, careers-related work at secondary school. This may mean that little had been done, but it may also mean that what had been done was not made memorable, or explicitly connected with future careers. Interviews at the start of the project suggested that there was limited awareness around routes into particular professions and links between subjects and careers.

Both schools held specific options events for year 9s annually. However, these also did not provide pupils with much careers advice and information. School 1 held an options evening for students and their parents early in the year, with an introduction by the head teacher and open classrooms where different subject teachers could be approached and materials examined. However, most subject material available was related to the GCSE course itself, with little information on future trajectories, study, and training routes, potential careers, or transferable skills. School 2 held a series of assemblies run by various departments to introduce the different GCSE subjects. However, these were not held until shortly before students had to choose their options, leaving students little time for consideration, and few presenters made specific links with relevant study routes and careers, relating their presentations only to the GCSE course itself, rather than making the connections between educational decisions and future careers:

> Careers and aspirations is done by form tutors, not us. (English teacher, School 1)

When asked about their knowledge of local industry, and the London labour market, both senior staff and teachers said they would not be confident to refer to the local or national situation in their teaching, and their knowledge was quite limited.

There was also a lack of impartiality regarding the careers information to which pupils had access. Year 9 pupils reported that, rather than asking them what they aspired to, teachers tried to encourage them to pick their own subjects for GCSE:

> My science teacher told me to take triple science because I'm good at it, but she doesn't know I want to be a lawyer. No other teachers have really talked about it. (Year 9 pupil, School 2)

Neither school provided vocational options as an alternative to the more academic study route of GCSEs. Initially, neither did they offer students information on local apprenticeship providers, preferring to focus on more academic routes. Pupil focus groups at the start of the project suggested that virtually no pupil knew what an apprenticeship was, including year 9s.

Stakeholders

Both schools had some links with local employers through the year 11 work experience placements, although these comprised mostly of retail placements. Besides these, School 2 at the start of the project had no links with employers at all, and School 1 had limited links. School 1 had just started two new mentoring programmes with suitability for younger pupils, one with an international law firm (years 8–13) and one with an auditing firm (years 9–13). It was too early for us to evaluate these programmes; however, staff felt concerned that they only benefited a limited number of pupils (one or two per year group), and were keen to find other options which could be of benefit to a larger number of students.

Individual

Neither school provided individual guidance interviews to all students. School 1 was offered interviews for children considered 'at risk' and those with special educational needs (SEN) from the local authority; however, they were supplementing this service by buying in guidance interviews for the other pupils from a private provider, who they considered more flexible than the local authority provider. Guidance interviews were therefore only provided for year 11:

> [The local authority service] focuses too much on the at risk and SEN groups. This current year, however, they have not been very proactive and out of 33 cases they have only seen 8 so far. Additionally, even though they should be looking at year 10 'vulnerable students' they aren't doing

this at the moment. In fact, they won't see anyone at all until every single SEN and at risk children have been seen. This is a massive problem, because these are the children who are most likely to be absent. (Careers coordinator, School 1)

School 2 was buying in one-to-one guidance interviews for all of year 11, and for some year 10s, from the local authority. Overall, pupils reported that very few teachers at secondary school had asked them informally what they wanted to do in the future:

My form tutor said if I worked hard I'd achieve my dreams. But she doesn't know what my dreams are. (Year 8 pupil, School 2)

Enhancing careers work: Stages 2 and 3

In the school year 2013/14, the schools worked towards enhancing their careers work, in particular for years 7–9. The focus was mainly on careers infrastructure, and engagement with employers and businesses.

Infrastructure

The enhancements worked best in School 1, owing to the supportive leadership, the prioritization of careers for the school as a whole, and the appointment of a qualified, full-time careers coordinator. School 1 continued to focus on getting high levels of GCSE results at A*–C, according to which schools are ranked in government league tables, suggesting that the connection between educational decisions and career decisions was not being made by the school leadership, as predicted by Watts (2013). Although by the end of the project, the case for a whole school CEIAG strategy was presented by the careers coordinator to SLT (who agreed in principle), there had been little actual movement in that direction.

A CEIAG staff working group was set up in School 1 at the start of the project to help progress the CEIAG agenda. This group started to raise awareness and enthusiasm among other staff to support initiatives, to support the careers coordinator in organizing events, and to support the teaching staff to link curriculum subjects to careers:

Teachers are getting more involved in CEIAG than they would otherwise. (Careers coordinator, School 1)

School 2 was unable to set up a staff working group due to lack of support from the SLT. However, having observed the success of this group at School 1, School 2 did set up a student careers working group as part of the existing student voice group, in order for the careers coordinator to gain student feedback on CEIAG.

The assistant head teacher at School 1 started to work on collecting and storing careers-related data in a systematic way:

Going forward, all data which relates to careers and work-related learning will be collected in a streamlined way. (Assistant head, School 1)

Although the careers coordinator pushed for this at School 2, it was not supported by the SLT, who did not regard it as necessary.

Programmes

Neither school had a structured, comprehensive careers programme, integrated into the curriculum and school year, with teaching staff aware and making joined-up contributions.

Continuing professional development (CPD) sessions in CEIAG for the teaching staff were planned at both schools to begin to work towards this. Unfortunately, owing again to a lack of leadership and support at School 2, the session was repeatedly postponed and never took place:

> We don't have a problem with careers. I don't see the need for major new initiatives. (Head teacher, School 2)

However, a session was put on in School 1, led by the assistant head and the careers coordinator. Fifteen staff members attended and the session was used to: raise awareness of CEIAG and statutory guidance; update staff on the work at school; inspire them to support the CEIAG agenda; give them the opportunity to communicate about what they do already, to create a more structured and holistic approach; support them to integrate careers work into their subject areas; and gain input on the CEIAG agenda. The regular CPD timeslot available was used for this session; however, this actually meant attendance was optional as it was pitted against other CPD sessions with different foci. It did, however, have an impact on some of those who attended:

> After the CPD session I've seen some change in some staff. (Careers coordinator, School 1).

Stakeholders

The schools tried different ways to increase and improve relationships with local employers and businesses. School 2 put on a 'Careers in Humanities Day' for year 7, run by the school staff themselves. The pupils interviewed visiting volunteers from different professions, which fall broadly into the category of humanities, on their different careers to gain an understanding of the jobs, the qualifications needed, and the pathways into those jobs. The volunteers were found through staff contacts and there was no financial cost to the school. However, the organization of a whole day off-timetable took a lot of resources in terms of staff time. It also required the support of several members of staff on the day itself, some of whom were reluctant. However, many of the pupils enjoyed it and felt that it had started to broaden their aspirational horizons:

> [I]t was good, I liked the art one cos I thought if you wanted to do art you had to be an art teacher and teach kids how to draw, but there's more stuff to do like illustrator, graphic designer, so you can see there's so many jobs in that subject. (Year 8 pupil, School 2)

Both schools also put on some one-off careers-related events with the support of external providers, including local education providers and non-specialist companies which offer educational activities. They included a local Education Business Partnership, an international bank, a national science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) educational organization, a local theatre, and a local creative arts organization. On the one hand, this was a good option, because it saved on the schools' own resources in terms of staff organizing time. This also proved an effective way of providing pupils with information about vocational qualifications and learning routes, which their schools did not explicitly provide them with. On the other hand, there were a number of problems. The external companies varied a lot and did not always deliver what they promised, such as sending fewer volunteers than had been agreed. It was also found that some companies had actually outsourced to others, which caused further misunderstandings. Moreover, despite prior agreements, the input was not always explicitly careers-related and, despite having been marketed as suitable for years 7–8, some materials were pitched too high. However, the feedback from student focus groups suggested their horizons had been broadened by the sessions:

> It was really useful, because people from different jobs came and from that we could decide our options and it could help us in our life. (Year 9 pupil, School 1)

> I liked it cos we learned different things, I'd never done engineering before at all, so I learnt that you can do engineering with anything, even scrap stuff, you can make it and plan design. (Year 7 pupil, School 2)

Some pupils also said their confidence increased with regard to careers decisions:

> [I]f somebody asks you what you want to do, if you don't tell them with confidence, that means you don't really want to do it, so that made me think as well that I need to make sure that I'm 100 per cent sure that I do what I want to do, and if anyone asks me, I need to hold my hand up straight and say yeah, this is what I wanna do, even if anyone laughs at me. (Year 9 pupil, School 1)

Both schools took their pupils on at least one careers-related trip to allow pupils to experience different industries and workplaces. However, with such trips too, provision varies considerably, as does the suitability for younger students and cost. Moreover, some trips are only available to a small select group, rather than the whole cohort:

> I went to KPMG at Canary Wharf, they were talking about how you can get in without going to uni. Mostly these trips are organized for gifted and talented students though. Some people have been to Cambridge University and on trips to theatres, but for these you have to pay so only some people go. (Year 8 pupil, School 1)

It was remarkable that in East London, several careers events are put on which focus on STEM subjects and industries, and very few which focus on the arts and humanities.

Individual

In these schools, universal careers guidance interviews were not provided for financial reasons. As discussed above, School 2 was providing a better service than School 1 in this respect, because of the better service provided by the local authority. Particularly in School 1, the focus on 'at risk' students at the expense of a universal service, as initiated by Connexions, continues.

Discussion and conclusion

Even though the responsibility for careers work had been shifted to schools in 2012, these two schools were still somewhat unprepared for this new responsibility when we started the project in October 2013. Despite this, we found there is a great deal that schools can do internally to enhance the school CEIAG programme. The success of the enhanced programme, even in School 2 where less was achieved, suggests that years 7–9 are not too young to benefit from careers education.

However, the study also seems to confirm that the shifting of CEIAG to schools and the withdrawal of funding from careers work are indeed contributing to a process of deterioration of careers provision in England, the undermining of the careers profession, and the diminishing of professionalism in careers provision. In this study, the most important factor for successful school-based careers work was effective and supportive leadership. Schools have many competing priorities and careers provision has now simply become one of these. Whilst there is no requirement or clear incentive for schools to make CEIAG a strategic priority, supportive leadership from the SLT made the difference in this study at least. The decision taken by School 1 to employ a full-time qualified careers coordinator, with a high status in the school, also contributed to the quality of provision made available, and the effective functioning of a staff working group.

As others have also argued (e.g. Hooley *et al*., 2012; House of Commons Education Committee, 2013), schools lack the specialist careers knowledge and expertise to provide a structured careers programme, or work towards the Quality in Careers Standard Kitemark, created by Careers England. Although research shows that careers learning works best when it is fully integrated into the existing curriculum (London Councils, 2013; Hooley *et al*., 2012), and activities are joined up, this did not happen in either project school, despite an awareness in School 1 that this was desirable. Labour market information was neither available, nor used to inform strategy or activities in either school in our study. School 1, which trialled CPD in CEIAG for teachers, was not prepared to make the session compulsory, so many teachers missed out. It seems clear that a little CPD for teachers cannot be a real substitute for the services of a professional careers educator. One session of CPD was not nearly enough to equip teachers with the tools and expertise to integrate careers learning in the curriculum, and the careers activities they did try remained stand-alone. The House of Commons Education Committee (2013) has recommended an expansion of the NCS's remit to include a capacity-building and brokerage role for schools, which would include assisting schools in designing their annual careers plan, the dissemination of local labour market information, and the promotion of quality standards (p.8). It remains to be seen how far this will come to fruition.

Moreover, as was the case particularly in School 2, schools will continue to focus on the A*–C GCSE route as the gold standard, owing to the government's continued emphasis on academic qualifications and GCSE attainment. These schools had no incentive to provide impartial advice on different learning routes, especially vocational routes, and neither did they fully grasp that educational decisions have a direct impact on careers decisions; even in School 1, the information given to year 9 pupils at the 'options' events was not wide-ranging, nor did it connect subjects with potential careers.

Our study suggested that the focus on engagement with employers and businesses to help with careers decision-making, at the expense of professional careers provision, continues to undermine provision. The schools in our study had few, if any, existing relationships with employers and businesses. Ofsted (2013) similarly found that schools do not engage with employers effectively, if at all, including not using local employer or enterprise partnerships. Although some companies and educational organizations run events to support schools in providing links and experiences for pupils, as we have shown, this engagement can be fraught with potential pitfalls for schools. Simply suggesting that schools develop relationships with local employers, as the government has done – having cut funding to the careers profession that would previously have provided this as a service – is not going to fill this gap. The teachers themselves did not have the experience, existing relationships, or time to provide this service. The National Careers Council has proposed an employer-led advisory board, comprising representatives from employers, education, and the career development profession (Andrews, 2013). Moreover, employers – whilst perhaps well able to provide insights into their own fields – are unlikely to be able to provide up-to-date information about different training routes and other fields, and thus cannot be a substitute for professional advisers.

Note

1. Local authorities still carry the remit to provide targeted careers guidance to those with special educational needs, and those who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging.

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Notes on the contributor

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