

**Joined-Up Guidance  
Where do we go from here?**

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Policy-makers and those responsible for the provision of guidance services are currently faced with implementing a number of new Government policies and programmes. A review of changes in public policy through the 1990s traces the progress made and the new challenges that lie ahead. It is suggested that the guidance community has reached a major crossroads. The community is challenged to show leadership in promoting the case for serious 'joined-up thinking' about guidance.

The Centre for Guidance Studies was created in 1998 by the University of Derby and five careers service companies (the Careers Consortium (East Midlands) Ltd.). The centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities; and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

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Two things about careers guidance occurred to me when I began to plan this lecture. The first is that historians may well look back on the 1990s as in many respects a decade of huge progress in careers education and guidance matters, at least by the standards generally applied to the sector. The second is that we may just at this moment be at something of a turning point in public policy, one that is worth recognising, reflecting on and where it seems to me that the future direction of policy is finely balanced. And that led me to realise that I was not as confident as I would like to be about where it might go.

### **Progress: young people**

The question of progress first. The record is substantial. In the area of provision for young people, the 1990s saw the first structural changes in 20 years, with the removal of the statutory careers service for young people, following the 1991 White Paper, from Local Education Authority control: a control that I am bound to say too often consigned them to a quiet backwater. This was a service that before 1994 displayed very large variations in the level of resource devoted to it, and even larger variations in the quality of service to clients. Moreover, there was

no observable relationship between the level of spend and the quality of delivery. With contractorisation, the services moved into an operating climate that is sharper, but has actually delivered many improvements in practice and quality and certainly a better all-round quality of provision to its main clients.

The 90s also brought some policy attention, not before time, to the links between careers education and careers guidance, and we saw some real and mainly effective attempts at joining-up. Careers education became a statutory element of the secondary curriculum, an entitlement, albeit outside the National Curriculum itself. And we got the legislation entrenching the access of careers services to schools so that guidance could be provided. This was a regrettable necessity, but while it recognised the negative point that there were indeed access difficulties (and sadly we know they have not all gone away yet) it also acknowledged that all young people need an entitlement to objective advice and guidance. And we saw government put more money into careers work, starting with the extra £87m of funds to help set up the new careers services following contractorisation. There has also been money - new money - for careers libraries in schools and colleges, year on year: a small thing, but important.

### **Progress: adults**

If we look beyond the statutory service for young people, we find in the 1990s the first experiments by the Department of Employment in voucher-based provision of guidance for adults. The 80s had been unkind in terms of public policy and expenditure on guidance for adults. The Tories abolished the public Occupational Guidance Service in 1981, not just for the cost reasons given at the time but because of a real failure - or was it wilful refusal? - to recognise that adults do sometimes need that kind of help. The same mean-spirited failure of understanding underpinned the abandonment of the job libraries set up by the Public Employment Service in the early 80s, as it did the reduction even of advisory services in the Jobcentres as Employment Service policy and practice became more overtly punitive. So the voucher experiments of the next decade can perhaps be seen as belated amends. Then we had the establishment of Learning Direct, conceived initially by a group including NICEC and the Guidance Council. This was the first-ever initiative in the UK to harness modern technology to create a system of rapid access to information on employment and education opportunities, with signposting to more in-depth services. We do of course hope that the original conception of the Line as offering advice and signposting on the full range of employment and education and training issues is not subverted by the increasingly close link with the Ufl.

And if we look beyond the immediate territory of government, the 90s saw the creation of NVQs in guidance, and at sector level the setting up of the Guidance Council itself - a recognition of the value of a collective voice, focused on the needs of the customer. That in turn provided a vehicle through which the guidance sector, with some public funding, could develop standards for guidance

provision. And of course the 90s saw the establishment in this university of the Centre for Guidance Studies, stimulated no doubt by the rapid growth in interest in guidance matters.

### **Recent progress**

All the government initiatives I have mentioned so far belong to the John Major era. The present government has not lacked initiative in this area. The Learning Age consultative paper of February 1998 was disappointingly thin on guidance issues, especially as regards adults. But there were handsome amends in the £54m now available, through new partnerships, for adult services - of information and advice - over the next three years: the first serious money any government has invested in this area. We must surely all welcome it wholeheartedly, and hope that David Blunkett's public statement that the spend is not a one-off initiative but the creation of a permanent policy and budget line will hold when even he has moved on from the DfEE.

The present Government has also supported the very important innovation enshrined in the Careers and Educational Guidance Accreditation Board, which will use the service standards developed by the sector, under the aegis of the Guidance Council, to offer public accreditation to the providers of adult guidance services. Possessing the Board's imprimatur will be compulsory for providers within the new Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships, but accreditation will be available to others as well, if they meet the standard. This development again springs from a partnership between the guidance sector and government, which put up the necessary development funding and is underwriting the costs of establishing the Board's operations.

If we turn to young people again, we see in the new National Curriculum, for implementation next year, much greater recognition of the value of careers education and guidance (even if the references are for my liking too firmly embedded in Key Stage 4, which for me is a bit late). And recently the Minister, Malcolm Wicks, launched new standards for careers education. Then in the summer we got the Learning to Succeed White Paper, with its plans for a new and broadly-based Youth Support Service and a promise that the new Learning and Skills Councils, both nationally and locally, will take responsibility for - I quote - 'planning and funding adult information, advice and guidance services', so that these 'remain at the heart of public policy, rather than - as has sometimes been the case in the past - on the margins'.

### **Common threads**

Taken together it adds up to a lot of progress. The current policy rhetoric is encouraging. There is not a lot that I personally would want to see undone (even if I can see areas where I would have liked even more progress).

Moreover, there are some important general threads which, in retrospect, we can I believe observe running through all these developments and which we should celebrate. First, through the 90s, guidance as an issue has moved further up the public policy agenda than any of us might have thought a practical possibility ten years ago - whatever our ambitions might have been. Secondly, we can see the emergence of something that we can truly regard as a guidance community, in a sense which we could probably not have seen it a decade ago. It has matured sufficiently for guidance organisations to come together, voluntarily, to develop, in the interests of their clients, a system of self-regulation of provider organisations - one which will complement the excellent work of the Institute of Careers Guidance in regulating the standards of individual professional practitioners. Third, it seems to me that the relationships between the guidance sector and government have been steadily becoming closer, in ways that are generally very productive.

### **Policy rationales**

But let us not get carried away too quickly. I want to spend a little time looking at what we know about the rationale for the increasing public policy interest in guidance services. Or rather, rationales in the plural, because the publicly-stated motivations of the previous and the current governments, not surprisingly, turn out to be rather different.

To take the Conservative government first. Looking back on this proved, for me, an object lesson in the fallibility of human memory. I had some recollection, for example, that the 1991 White Paper which announced the change in responsibilities for the Careers Service had attempted some extended argument in favour of the change and also had tried to put it into some kind of long-term economic context. I should have known better. A check revealed very little by way of overt rationale for the changes: a passing reference to the economy's need for more people with higher skills; a bow in the direction of finding new organisational arrangements that would make co-operation with employers easier, and - importantly for that government - bring private-sector disciplines to bear on public services; and a Prime Ministerial foreword in which John Major said that 'Our objective is simple: it is to encourage all our young people to develop to the best of their ability'. Beyond that, for young people, as the White Paper itself said, 'the individual is at the heart of these policies'. And as for adults, their 1990s initiatives were confined to help for the unemployed: guidance, if you like, on a deficit model.

We have a paradox here. There were enormous strides in the development of guidance services for young people, and they need to be recognised. But we have to recognise also that as far as government was concerned they often sprang from political motivations far removed from any understanding of guidance needs. Conservative policy on the careers service was primarily part of their general approach to the organisation of public services. There was not a lot

of consistent policy-making in the guidance area under the Major government, and a lot of the reforms happened by accident. The guidance community itself was, I believe, more responsible for growing a significantly greater awareness of the economic and social importance of guidance in the public mind than was government in that period.

Now we have the Blair government, which as I said has not lacked initiative. The Learning Age certainly embraces the need of the individual to see learning as the key to personal prosperity, but it is strong too on the link between individual improvement and the nation's economic success and social and family stability. The government's extended case in favour of developing a truly learning society seems to me to be well-argued and timely. And we can see these arguments applied with a degree of consistency across a range of policies and practice. But not yet, as far as I can tell, with any great consistency in the field of guidance, where I detect a much less sure understanding of the issues, a reluctance perhaps to engage in open debate, and the beginnings, perhaps, of some policy-making that I would find it hard to accept as 'joined-up'. The rhetoric is fine. Let us celebrate - genuinely - a government that says it wants guidance, as well as information and advice, at the heart of public policy. But let us not get carried away. The acid test is at the level of delivery.

And that is why, in spite of all the progress that I outlined earlier, I am if anything more worried rather than less, and certainly more worried than I was ten years ago, about what is happening, and not happening, to guidance policy and services. And it is why - to go back to where I began - I found myself wondering whether we are at some kind of turning-point in public policy, and even whether any turn might be in the wrong direction.

### **The Youth Support Service**

Let me illustrate my concerns in three important areas. The first is about the Government's plans for a new Youth Support Service, which we expect to be implemented from next April, though in what form no-one can even now be sure. We do know that the service is intended to help all young people between the ages of 13 and 19: in other words, that it will be in some sense a universal service. Learning to Succeed talks about the service providing high-quality advice, guidance - that word is clearly there - and support to all young people. We know too that it is intended to make sure that the most disadvantaged and disaffected young people get access to specialist help, and that its success will be measured both by increases in participation in learning pre- and post-16 and by improved educational attainment. We are also told that the new service is intended to bring together in some kind of unified framework the activities of more agencies than have, probably, ever been brought together to bear on the needs of one client group. It could almost be the epitome of joined-up services for the individual.

Why, then, is every guidance professional I have talked to seriously worried about what the Government is trying to do? It is not that anyone doubts the value of much improved access for young people to all the services that are to be available. Nor have I heard any criticism of the aim of concentrating special help on those with the greatest needs. On the contrary: most agree that such help for the socially-excluded is long overdue. Nor is there any reluctance on the part of the current providers of services (of all kinds) to change the way they do things, to work more closely together. But there are big problems.

One is that so far at least, the Government has not spelled out just what the universal service is to do. Will it have real substance - will it be a guidance service - or will it simply act as a filter, removing all but the 'hard cases' needing intensive support? The silence on this question has created misgivings especially among those who have detected a lack of wholehearted political commitment to careers guidance for all young people - the much-quoted view that the 'more able' do not really need careers advice. So too has the failure of the Learning to Succeed White Paper to make any reference to careers education, a subject which the Social Exclusion Unit's report mentioned only to criticise for patchy quality. There is real concern that the provision of a universal service of careers guidance is under threat, and puzzlement that the contribution that good careers education and guidance can make to securing the Government's own agenda on raising participation and achievement is not understood (David Blunkett at least has made it plain that post-16 dropout is a serious problem that must be addressed, and it would be good to see a clear recognition that good guidance is one of the best ways of doing so).

There is the worry too that the Social Exclusion Unit report Bridging the Gap relied on a very static and stereotyped analysis of disadvantage and looked only at issues outside education and not at the equally important issues within it. There is concern about the resource implications of delivering everything government says it wants - and the signals here are so far not encouraging. And underpinning the whole is a fear that whatever the Government's headline rhetoric, the practical result will be not a quality universal service but a service that is so heavily targeted on the 'mad, the bad and the sad' as to be counterproductive. A deficit model for the disadvantaged will not work. It would be a pity - to put it no higher - if a brave attempt at joined-up policy on youth support in fact produced the very opposite result.

### **Lifelong learning**

My second area of concern is around the place of guidance issues in relation to policies on lifelong learning. It seems clear to me that, as night follows day, if you accept the case for lifelong learning, you accept the case for lifelong guidance. You cannot have one without the other. The case for lifelong learning is essentially that we are moving inexorably into a complex and shifting world economy, where the information explosion, the exponential rate of development

of technology and the globalisation of markets - three factors so closely linked that, like the chicken and the egg, we do not really know which comes first - will impact on individuals in ways we can hardly predict, other than to realise that they will create uncertainty, lead to rapid changes in demand for skills and require increasing flexibility at work. We already live in a world where the daily quantity of world trade exceeds that of the whole of the year 1940, where the daily number of phone calls exceeds that of the whole of 1970 and each day there are more e-mails than in the whole of 1990. The impact on commerce and industry is to generate new products and services with greater speed than ever before and to put a huge premium on the ability of the national economy to respond - and we can be sure that the successful economies of the future will be the ones with the highest skills base. As at the national, so at the personal level.

Encouraging lifelong learning must, in these circumstances, be right. People will have to update and adapt their knowledge and skills faster than ever before. It is not just a matter of no more jobs for life. Most people never had them. But many did have skills for life - and there will not be any such thing in future. For me, these circumstances make an overwhelming case that individuals are going to need help in reaching decisions about the particular steps they might take at intervals in their working lives, to raise their skills and adapt to change. They are bound to need information, advice and - at times - guidance. The nation as well as individuals would benefit from the provision of good, accessible all-age information, advice and guidance services.

But no government has found it possible, at least so far, to recognise and to act on the argument. The present one is no exception. There is a hole beneath the rhetoric. Take Learning to Succeed. There is a whole section on 'supporting adults through good quality information, advice and guidance services'. It argues the case for helping people through such services to embark on learning. And it says government is already taking steps to improve information, advice and guidance services. The steps it goes on to describe are all about information and advice, and we do not hear about guidance again until the end of the section where we are told about the role the Learning and Skills Council will play in all these services.

So guidance, here, is a dog that does not bark. What is going on? I think the problem is two-fold. First, discussion about adult guidance always gets bogged down by what I can only describe as blue funk about money inside the government machine. It seems to be impossible to debate the issue without running into this. Yet the funk is unjustifiable. I have not heard anyone one suggesting that guidance services for adults should be wholly state-funded. On the contrary: those who have thought about the issue are clear that we need to demystify guidance, make it accessible for the ordinary adult and encourage a climate where people are as ready to buy careers guidance when they need it as they are to buy in, say, financial advice - perhaps more so. That is not to say that there might be a public interest in subsidy for guidance to at least some adults.



One wonders what has happened to the tantalising notion current a year ago that Individual Learning Accounts could be used in part for buying guidance.

Secondly, there seems to be a limited understanding of what guidance really is and what it can do both for individuals and in support of public policy objectives. Policy seems to take an unduly instrumental view - reflecting perhaps the endemic short-termism of Whitehall and Westminster. One example is the failure of New Deal to embrace objective, client-centred guidance - recent research for the College of Guidance Studies drew attention to the scope for better practice here. And we might see the ever-closer links between Learning Direct and the Ufl as effectively the hijacking of the original NACCEG concept: from a source of information and signposting about the whole range of education, training and employment matters to a very instrumental operation that, if its managers are not very careful, may come to serve the Ufl's targets rather than the needs of individuals.

### **Joined-up delivery**

My third big point, after concerns over the Youth Support Service and the reluctance of government to recognise the link between lifelong learning and lifelong guidance, arises directly from the other two. I would have hoped for joined-up thinking, and delivery, of policy and services on guidance, and indeed on information and advice services, for both young people and adults. We are not there yet. Instead, policy suggests comprehensive services, including guidance, for 13-19s; information and advice services, but not guidance, for adults. Learning to Succeed separates responsibility between the national Learning and Skills Council for adult services (note that the LSC's general remit is in the post-16 area) and the new Youth Support Agency for young people (up to the age of 19). And of course the DfEE as parent department will continue to have a voice. I am bound to say that the Department was not conspicuously successful in integrating policy when it had responsibility for all of it. Fragmenting the responsibility must at least create a risk to integration, to joined-up thinking, in future.

### **An agenda for action**

In this situation I believe the guidance community has a responsibility to show leadership in opening up debate and getting the issues understood. I said earlier that in many ways the sector's relationships with government have become closer and more productive. That is something to build on. It should, I suggest, be setting out clearly the case for real joined-up thinking about guidance. Let me spell out a possible agenda.

First, we have to make the case for guidance itself. The guidance community needs to help government understand the fundamental need to recognise the link between lifelong learning and lifelong guidance, by whatever means we can.

That should be through public debate and influencing, and finding useful allies. It also includes not being afraid to spell out to government what it might be getting wrong. That in turn means getting more political, which does not mean party-political. It means getting across why objective guidance is an important element in the range of services that individuals will need, now and in future, to help them adapt to a fast-changing world. And we have to spell out very clearly why the provision of such services will support the agenda of governments - I make the point, deliberately, in a general and not a party way. No government in future will ignore the impact of economic change on the country's skills base.

Secondly, we need to open up and develop a sensible debate about the resourcing of guidance services, and press the message that improving lifelong guidance services is not about setting up an enormous new publicly-funded service - though we do need sensible discussion about how far there might be a public interest in subsidy for some clients. We do need to focus more on the scope for creating a market in guidance services, which is less frightening than it sounds. An important part of developing a market, I would add, is removing the barriers to guidance that exist for the client, including demystifying the process. There is ample evidence that people find the concept hard to understand and the jargon of professionals off-putting, and personally I am in no doubt that there is an unhelpful knock-on effect on understanding within the government machine. If we are serious about spreading the message on lifelong guidance then these things have to be tackled.

Third, we need to get on to the agenda the notion that however important the encouragement people get to go on learning, guidance is about the whole of an individual's needs. There will be times when guidance needs to be about careers and even about immediate employment opportunities. There is a real risk at present, I think, that lifelong learning policy is squeezing out everything else.

Fourth, the sector needs to encourage consistency in policy across the age range. For the guidance community, this will entail taking a much broader and comprehensive view of the territory than it has always done in the past. Who is, for example, taking up the case for joined-up thinking across the school/post-school divide? There is no point in helping young people switch on to guidance at school, as the new National Curriculum will try to do, if when they leave they discover that guidance services have disappeared off the map. Let us see the guidance community intervening, for example, in the QCA's forthcoming review of the '14-19 curriculum' to press for a curriculum outcome that ensures young people enter the labour market with an understanding of the need for lifelong learning, and the place of lifelong guidance in helping them. This would be a major contribution to the development of a learning society.

Fifth, the guidance community needs to build on that greater sense of self and maturity as a community that I mentioned earlier. It can not expect others to do this for it - it must act itself. For a recent example of apparently missed

opportunity, I refer you to last month's report from the Commons Education and Employment Select Committee on post-16 participation in learning. The Committee undertook a useful review of the area. It noted, as I have done, the government's proposals to create separate guidance bodies for young people and adults, and stressed the desirability of a seamless service - albeit in the context of guidance on entering learning opportunities. The Committee, according to its report, examined no witnesses from the guidance sector, and received no representations from any organisation in it. So a chance was lost to stress the desirability of objective, career-related guidance in which learning is bound to play a major part but which should not be confined to that.

## **Conclusion**

Most of these messages are, of course, for government as well as the guidance sector. But we are at one of those interesting points where progress may be easier if ways are found to help government than if all the thinking is left to them. You may feel I have been unduly critical of the Government in this lecture. If that is so, it is because I am concerned that all the very good things they are aiming to do may be undermined, quite seriously, for the wrong reasons and in a situation where getting things right is not all that difficult.

For me, given the reservations I expressed at the start about the possible direction of policy, the jury is still out. We expect shortly the Government's prospectus for the Learning and Skills Councils, and publication of the Bill which will, among other things, set up the Youth Support Service. These will be important tests of future direction. I hope they will give us comfort that the last decade will not be remembered as some kind of high water mark in the development of guidance services but as a major stepping stone in the long-developing recognition that access to high-quality guidance for everyone is part of a civilised society and a recognition that government and people have the kind of grip they need on meeting the challenges of the economy and society.