

Developing careers work in schools: learning from experience



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Institutions are working in a changing and challenging climate for careers work – in terms of its scope and nature, and the roles, responsibilities and negotiated partnerships of those involved. There are ever-fewer familiar reference points. At the same time young people and their parents and carers are facing increasingly complex choices in the worlds of learning and earning, increasing the need for effective careers work in schools and colleges.

This Briefing seeks to promote discussion amongst careers-work practitioners, school and college senior managers, providers of professional development for careers work, and policy-makers at local and national level. It is concerned with the promotion, nurture and sustainable development of careers work. It draws lessons from a year-long project to develop careers work in a cluster of schools – three 11-16, an 11-18 and 2 special schools, a further education college and a work-based learning provider. The context was a demanding inner-city area - pockets of considerable wealth mixed with significant poverty and social and economic deprivation.

The Briefing is written by Barbara McGowan, NICEC Senior Fellow who designed, developed and delivered the project. The Islington 14-19 Pathfinder commissioned the work.

MAPPING THE TERRITORY

Developing careers work in schools¹ means engaging with the complex reality of varying roles, settings, partnerships and language. The following sets out some parameters derived from this project.

Establishing the focus. A key task for careers work in many locations is to:

- encourage the majority of young people to see themselves as having more extensive opportunities than their immediate family or community setting might support or suggest;

and, in all settings to:

- enable young people to access appropriate career-relevant learning to make and implement sustainable decisions within these wider horizons.

Defining development. Much careers work seems to reflect pragmatic considerations around: resources – material and human, including time and expertise; structures – status, timetabling and routine; the perceived inaccessibility (often due to time constraints) of opportunities for appropriate professional development – with ‘authority’ adopted from elements in DfES and QCA publications, and young people’s career learning ‘needs’ presumed from common-sense, but usually uncanvassed, assumptions.

This means that careers work in 14-19 institutions can be:

- patchy in quality;
- fragmented in development and delivery;
- often narrowly targeted on key points of transition;
- focused on ‘provision’ – inputs and activities.

Careers work needs to be developed so that it is coherent, progressive, and outcomes-led; and because of its significance for the future of young people, career learning needs to become a central feature of the main curriculum.

There is often little evidence of careers work being underpinned by thoughtful design. In practice, there is a pragmatic tendency to focus strongly on support for transitions (at 14+, 16+ and 18+); this is viewed both as a need and a rationale that is convincing to senior managers.

There is nothing improper about this, but comprehensive and justifiable development calls for an underpinning rationale – a ‘case’ for careers work that explains why, and what, it needs to be. Without this it is difficult to justify resource demands; to clarify the roles and responsibilities of partners; and to frame coherent and progressive learning outcomes to support sustainable choice.

Recognising roles and responsibilities. Colleagues occupying specialist careers-work roles within institutions can have a range of titles – ‘careers teacher’, ‘careers co-ordinator’, ‘... with responsibility for careers work’ – reflecting the institutional perception of the position they hold. ‘Careers co-ordinator’ is used in this Briefing as a generic term to cover all these roles.

Whilst the focus here is on the development of careers work in schools, the career offer to young people is most often through partnerships with external partners, most notably Connexions. Connexions Personal Advisers (PAs) attached to a specific school sometimes have appropriate training and experience to work with the careers co-ordinator to develop the curriculum offer, in addition to the guidance role they fulfill in direct work with students. Additionally, where careers advisory staff who are curriculum specialists are employed by Connexions as part of a central team, they can make a valuable contribution to the development of careers work in schools that request this level of support.

Finding a common language. This is one of the key issues for careers work. There is frequently no agreement about its nature, and its scope and focus both between and within institutions, and between institutions and agencies. This is not a new phenomenon; it has emerged in other studies².

It is important to recognise that CEG (Careers Education and Guidance) does not describe the same package of careers work as IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance). IAG does not explicitly refer to career learning, which for young people is usually focused within the curriculum; although it may imply its existence. Career learning underpins the ability of young people to respond positively to career information, and engage more dynamically with the learning opportunities offered through advice and guidance as and when it becomes available, internally or externally to the institution. Coherent design and delivery of career learning in the curriculum is therefore critical to the success of IAG provision for 14-19-year-olds.

Where the term ‘careers work’ is used in this Briefing, it is as a generic descriptor to include the work from all these sources. It incorporates careers education programmes, career learning within and beyond the curriculum, and the information, advice and guidance activities that are part of, and draw on, career learning.

All educational institutions begin at a different point along the spectrum of development: some have rather less far to travel than others.

¹Learning contexts within further education and work-based learning vary from schools; however, the development principles are congruent and can be applied with integrity. ‘Schools’ is used as a generic term.

²Andrews, D., Law, B., McGowan, B., and Munro, M. (1998) *Managing Careers Work in Schools: the Roles of Senior Managers, Careers Co-ordinators and Governors*. NICEC Project Report, Cambridge, CRAC

ANCHORING DEVELOPMENT – 3 ‘RS’

Career development work can only be successful if it is constructed on robust foundations. It needs:

- a strong **Rationale** – to show what exactly career learning is concerned with, and why. Some thoughtful underpinning argues the case for resources;
- demonstrable **Relevance** – to meet learning needs that can vary from place to place. Professional discussion needs to identify what is most useful for young people in a specific location, and why;

- a **Relationship** to existing work – to make strong links that can help to anchor new work. Professional enquiry needs to find out what is already in place to respond to known learning needs, and then identify what else might be done.

Such attention to the foundations of careers work makes it more likely that planned development will be sustainable. These considerations are critical when planning any substantial development that is intended to be long-term and/or high impact.

<i>What needs to be done ?</i>	<i>Why it is important ?</i>	<i>How it can be achieved?*</i>
<p>Find a rationale:</p> <p>An exploration of the scope and nature of careers work – a search for a common language and framing of the purpose(s) of careers work. This needs to consider and accommodate the changing contexts in which careers work is being developed and delivered, as well as focusing on support for sustainable choice. Careers work is not designed, developed and delivered in isolation; it is most effective through partnership with those who share a common focus and values.</p>	<p>Credible, collaborative partnership work and development needs consensus about the proper concerns of careers work, at least within the institution, and with the staff of agencies with which it works – especially Connexions. Without this it is difficult to integrate clear role functions, and parallel, complementary and mutually supportive activities. If partners do not thoughtfully identify points of convergence, young people can be exposed to fragmented experience and even ambiguity, instead of experiencing coherence from the support they receive.</p>	<p>CPI⁴ can be a useful tool for addressing these issues. It relates well to the QCA framework of self-development, career exploration and career management. Its emphasis on Coverage (what young people need to know); Process (how we can help them to deal with what they find out); and Influence (who and what is affecting them as they plan for their future), brings the complex realities of understanding and managing career development into a coherent focus. It can enable all who do this work to find common ground, and to identify the most useful supports and roles.</p>
<p>Demonstrate relevance:</p> <p>An analysis of local needs – the identification of the career-relevant ‘needs’ of young people in a specific locality. This understanding means staff can most effectively support them as they plan for the next steps into their future of learning and/or earning.</p>	<p>The evidence for development priorities will come from an analysis of local needs. The National Framework 11-19⁵ suggests a cluster of learning outcomes for Key Stages 3 and 4, and post-16; this is a useful starting point. But these general learning outcomes need to be evaluated and developed against the complex and varied realities of local situations, and of the individual and often challenging circumstances of many young people. Many need help to recognise that the concept of ‘career’ has relevance for them.</p>	<p>A draft framework of learning outcomes needs to be shared with ‘significant others’ – a group of relevant colleagues. These can include colleagues who are careers specialists, and those who are not, young people, parents, governors and local employers. The aim is to share what is proposed, enquire whether others agree or disagree and why, and add other suggestions. More points of view can add richness and depth, and several can verify – or not - the initial professional suggestions for programme development.</p>
<p>Establish relationships:</p> <p>A curriculum audit – a mapping activity to identify what support for career learning is already in place, and the terms and conditions on which it is accessible. This needs to be cover both recognisable career provision as well as the wider curriculum, and work with young people that is outside and beyond named roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Those responsible for the career offer frequently feel they are working in isolation, on the margins of the main curriculum and its concerns. Agreement on a framework of career learning outcomes for young people offers a basis for mapping sources of existing support - for identifying those areas across and beyond the subject curriculum that can help. Development work needs to identify and build on what is usefully happening; it needs to consolidate as well as innovate.</p>	<p>An agreed framework of learning outcomes needs to be shared with all who are engaged in the learning development of young people in that age range. It can enable them to recognise where and on what terms their work already supports this learning, and maybe what else might be done. Such an approach raises awareness of the nature of career learning in a wider arena; enables the person responsible for careers work to co-ordinate the learning; and encourages curriculum support. Total support is unlikely, but some is highly probable.</p>

*Detailed support frameworks for all this work are published separately as *Developing Careers Work in Schools: Tools and Processes* Copies available from the NICEC Website: www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications.htm

⁴ CLN (2005). *CPI-a: Getting to Know CPI* free download from The Career-learning Café – ‘moving on’ at www.hihohiho.com

⁵ DFES (2003) *Careers Education and Guidance in England: a National Framework 11-19*

SECURING DEVELOPMENT – 3 ‘IS’

There are generic issues that impinge on the ability of institutions to develop and deliver effective careers work. No single institutional factor makes such development more likely or less likely. The reality is more complicated.

Three kinds of consideration are significant. The interactions between them determine the degree to which substantial and effective development can occur.

Ideas – how far colleagues are prepared to think through what developing careers work involves.

Challenges to be overcome tend to revolve around:

- recognition that programme development needs to be ideas led – with the detail of the activity coming later;
- resources - especially the time required in an already crowded job role;
- the need to work with a wide range of disparate staff;
- uncertain role status to initiate an extensive rethink;
- opportunities to set up a dialogue with relevant senior managers, perceived or actual;
- active support from the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) in a context of conflicting priorities;
- perceived need, where extensive provision is already in place;
- ability to engage with learning design.

Without some willingness and ability to engage with developmental thinking, new ideas and different ways of doing things, there is no new territory to move into and the status quo remains.

Infrastructure - the extent to which colleagues are able to draw on an effective organisational and management infrastructure to support these ideas.

It can be difficult to unpick what is cause and effect here:

- does the perceived status of careers work and the careers co-ordinator role, in the eyes of the individual and the institution, lead to good underpinning practice?
- or does ‘good practice’ by the career co-ordinator result in a stronger role and curriculum status for careers work?

There are undoubtedly some real issues for individuals related to levels of resourcing and institutional ethos. But where ‘careers’ is a recognisably responsible and status-holding role for the individual, it generates motivation, commitment, and a sense of empowerment to communicate with confidence with senior managers. Careers work needs to be managed from a significant middle-management position, with expectations about targets and outcomes; and the work needs to be carried out in a manner similar to any other mainstream area of the curriculum.

Influence – what levels and degree of institutional support colleagues can access.

This is an important key to any sustainable development of careers work, with access determined from both directions:

- the *role* authority of senior managers is a significant factor in the ability of the careers co-ordinator - and other partners - to influence the institutional careers work development;
- equally the *professional* authority of the careers co-ordinator is critical if there is to be any informed and sustainable development.

Developing careers work is clearly negated if there is no access from either direction, and seriously undermined if only one side of the channel is open. *It makes little difference which one is closed or open.* Perceptions can be as hindering as reality. Careers co-ordinators may perceive lack of interest and support from senior managers, even when they express strong support. Head teachers can perceive lack of commitment from careers co-ordinators, who can be unaware of difficulties.

It can be problematic if the careers co-ordinator and/or Connexions partner is new and/or inexperienced. Where members of the SLG can be involved in professional development work alongside careers co-ordinators it lends role authority to the work, and gives the SLG a deeper level of understanding than they may otherwise access. It can be a useful foundation for them when negotiating institutional agreements with external partners.

The ambivalent positioning of careers work within formal school structures –between being a ‘subject’ or an ‘aspect’ of the pastoral system – can restrict the degree of ‘influence’ that can be accessed. Equally, Ofsted inspections could offer support for careers work by bringing it in from the margins of key success indicators for schools.

These three elements – ideas, infrastructure and influence - are mutually dependent. Without some good ideas, there is no new ground to move into; without an effective underpinning good practice, there is no supporting context in which good ideas can be nurtured; without access to institutional support, it is hard to achieve any substantial recognition for, and embedding of, any development, however good the thinking.

When all three elements are present, the development of careers work is more likely; but the extent and sustainability of the work lies within the interaction between the elements. The permutations are extensive.

In all settings ‘weak links’ of many kinds, within any of the elements, and between any of the personnel, can occur.

The key to the effective development of careers work is the degree to which there is recognition of the interdependence of the three aspects, and the ability and willingness to recognise and address, the ‘weak links’.

IMPLEMENTING DEVELOPMENT

Implementing career development work means being able to anchor the work in strong concepts – 3 ‘Rs’; and secure it within institutional practice – 3 ‘Is’; but it also means being able to both begin and follow it up effectively⁶.

Getting started needs to be a well-thought-through process. It sets the focus, depth and direction, and will determine the extent and effectiveness of the outcomes.

A useful starting point is to conduct a review of current careers work looking both at provision and management. Examining only provision may not offer sufficient comment on depth, quality and sustainability; and using a tick-list approach may only record ‘facts’ rather than indicating the terms on which development can be useful. An analytical and evaluative approach to review can indicate priorities for development⁷. If structured as a professional discussion between collaborating partners the process is more likely also to provide a motivational basis for action.

Whatever the approach, the resulting planned work needs to be both manageable and sustainable.

Planning for sustainability is key to successful follow up work. The planning process will suggest areas of curriculum, staff or organisational development that must be addressed to progress the work.

Managing sustainable development means recognising the interdependence of these three. Curriculum development by itself puts pressure on staff and structures to accommodate change for which they may be unprepared and/or resistant. Staff development alongside curriculum change is critical for staff motivation and ability. Similarly, the implications for organisational change must be identified from the beginning so that any new ‘demands’ can be planned for.

A professional dialogue to create a strategic plan is desirable, and time to do this is essential. Where planning is weak or underdeveloped, little advance will be made, however effectively careers work and the local needs are understood and framed.

Managing careers work in the increasingly complex context of existing and emerging partnerships is becoming a very significant aspect of the work of the careers-co-ordinator; the title ‘careers work manager’⁸ may be more appropriate for the kind of responsibilities involved.

⁶Detailed support frameworks for all this work are published separately as *Developing Careers Work in Schools: Tools and Processes* Copies available on the NICEC Website: www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications.htm

⁷ See ⁶ above

⁸Andrews, D. & Barnes, A. (2004) *Leading and Managing Careers Work in Schools: the Changing Role of the Careers Co-ordinator* (NICEC Briefing) Cambridge: CRAC

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Careers work depends on effective partnerships.

Internal partnerships are commonly forged between the careers co-ordinator and colleagues in roles, including:

- heads of year / tutors / other pastoral staff / teaching assistants (TAs) and higher level TAs;
- teachers of citizenship / RE / PSHE / subject staff;
- Aim Higher / work-related learning co-ordinators / SENCO / inclusion manager / librarian;
- other professionals, e.g. school nurse / counsellor / learning mentor;
- governors.

Parents are perceived as key influencers, and could be recruited more often as active partners.

Internal partnerships can powerfully support coherence in student learning experiences, but are vulnerable to insufficient understanding and/or commitment. Outcomes are affected by the robustness of professional relationships, and management procedures.

External partnerships are commonly developed between the school and outside organisations, including:

- Connexions;
- Education Business Partnerships (EBPs);
- feeder and destination institutions;
- work-based learning providers and other employers;
- Local Authority advisers;
- agencies offering professional training and support.

External partnerships can contribute expertise that is difficult for internal staff to offer; but there is not always a strong alignment with the school or shared understanding of the work. Outcomes are affected by the robustness of the contracting process, and management structures.

When partnerships work well, they bring benefits to both partners and clients: in professional support/colleagueship; wealth and diversity of contribution; and the capacity to respond more dynamically, immediately and holistically to the career needs of young people and their families.

Partnerships work best when they:

- have allocated time and other resources to build collaborative working and deliver practical activities;
- are based on mutual trust and respect;
- are between individuals with high levels of knowledge and expertise within their respective roles;
- are between organisations and individuals that have a common understanding of the work to be done;
- clarify the terms and conditions for working together;
- have strong management and planning systems;
- define, negotiate and agree clear roles and responsibilities for everyone involved;
- attend with care to succession planning.

SOME QUESTIONS

The changing contexts for careers work present challenges to all those responsible for developing the work. This Briefing has suggested some of the supports available and some of the barriers that exist for school-based career development in the present situation.

Any serious and sustainable effort to 'drive up the quality of CEG in schools'⁹ will need to address structural weaknesses. Given the climate of change about who does what in terms of careers work, the work needs to be promoted and support negotiated for it. This requires both internal and external collaboration, and involves existing and emerging partners. Actions will be needed by various key players to support the work.

Questions to initiate discussion about developing useful and sustainable careers work in schools include:

- How can individuals and institutions be encouraged and enabled to promote career learning? How can they effectively negotiate support for career guidance? Who needs to be involved? At what levels? What kinds of support do they require?
- What kind of professional, structural and funding relationship between career learning and career guidance providers would most effectively support the career development needs of young people?
- Can careers work be integrated with other personal development learning, for example the single framework for Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PELTS) being developed for use in schools, colleges and work-based learning providers? In this setting will careers work be able to retain its unique contribution to the future of young people? If YES, what curriculum and management structures would be most effective? If NO, where is its future?

- What are the professional development implications for those in key roles to enable them to effectively promote, support and develop this work, especially in settings where IAG must be negotiated, sometimes by and with new partners?
- What might be some useful starting-points in institutions to encourage careers work to move in from the margins? For example:
 - What degree of shared understanding of the nature of careers work, and of local needs of young people, exists within the institution?
 - How far is there understanding between the school and its external partners of the nature of careers work – both career learning in the curriculum, and school-based and labour-market-linked career guidance?
 - How effective is the dialogue between the key players – both internally and externally?
 - To what extent is there clarity of roles and responsibilities by and between the key players?
 - Are those in *role and professional* authority, able and inclined to influence change?
 - How effective and clear are the management processes and procedures for careers work? Who is accountable to whom, for what?
 - To what extent is the Senior Leadership Group committed and equipped to support this work?

This is about support for young people; if we get it wrong, we jeopardise the ability of young people to make sustainable choices and access future life chances.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further copies of this Briefing can be downloaded from www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications.htm, or obtained from NICEC on receipt of the costs of postage. For single copies, please send a first class stamped and self-addressed envelope to: NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX. For multiple copies, please contact NICEC on 01223 460277 or nicec@crac.org.uk

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Useful reading:

- Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. DfES 2004
14-19 Education & Skills. DfES February 2005
Youth Matters: (Green Paper). DfES July 2005
Youth Matters: Next Steps. DfES March 2006
Report of the End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance. DfES 2005
 McGowan, B. (2006) *Developing careers work: issues and considerations*. www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications.htm
 McGowan, B. (2006) *Developing careers work: tools and processes*. www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications.htm

⁹ Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Report of the End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance*, London DfES