

What does good careers advice look like?

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We live in interesting times for career guidance. I think that we are once more a sector on the move, and some quite exciting things are happening. Most importantly the Government is once more investing in career guidance. I think that's great, and I think that's something that we should really celebrate today.

But, one of my jobs, I think, in doing the kind of work that I do, is to write stuff down and try and remember things that happened. Because of this I think that we need to acknowledge that we are now seeing a shift in Government policy, and we are now seeing a very positive move forward and some investment, in comparison to where we were, the investment is very much smaller. We've got about 10% of the government money invested in career guidance that we had in 2010.

Now, I'm sure it's going to be invested much more wisely, and I'm sure it's going to be very effective. I'm excited for us to start thinking about how this is going to make a difference in schools, and for young people in Britain. But, I think we have to recognise that there are issues of scale. Where I'm coming from this morning is, I think that the government has been moving in a very positive direction, and we need to encourage that, and we need to build on that, but we also need to recognise that that is not the end of the process.

So, to this end, in terms of thinking about how we build on what's happening at the moment, I'm going to try and make three points which, I think, say something about what I think effective career guidance is. So, the first point is that I believe that careers education and guidance is a vital part of the education system. And, I think one of the things I want stress is, it's not just about matching people into jobs. This is not just a placement process, where we find kids who haven't got work, and we find them a job. It's a much more, long term, and much more profound set of educational questions about who you are and where you live in the world.

In a recent paper¹ I said, career education and guidance really seeks to answer five which lie at the heart of all education. They are: who am I; how does the world work; where do I fit into the world; how can I live with others in the world; and, how do I go about changing the world? If we think about career education and guidance in this way, it's central to what education's about. It's about making critical, creative, entrepreneurial, and considerate citizens for our country.

I think that this conception of career education and guidance also highlights the importance and the value of cross curricular working. So, career education should exist as a subject in its own right. But, I think it also speaks to a number of other areas within the curriculum, and there are very positive links we can make. So, that's my first point, that career guidance is an important

¹ Hooley, T. (2015). *Emancipate Yourselves from Mental Slavery: Self-Actualisation, Social Justice and the Politics of Career Education*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

part of the education system, and it serves purposes which are not just short term ones about matching people into work, and making sure that we don't end up with kids on the dole, important though that is as a function of career education and guidance.

The second point is that career guidance needs to be developmental and progressive. And, we've done lots and lots of research, lots and lots of different studies, literature reviews, and so on.² And, I think what they all boil down to is the essential point that, when you're dealing with careers education and guidance, you're dealing with something which in essence is very like other kinds of education. It's not very like a magic moment in which everything is solved through a 15 minute interaction between a young person and a professional, or a young person and an employer, or a young person and a moment of work experience.

What we found, and what we've learnt, and other scholars who work in this area have learnt is that, in order to get people to learn about the world, to learn about the world of work, and to learn and think about their place within it, they need to do a lot of different things. And, that might include hearing from employers, that might include having careers lessons, that might include work experience, learning from labour market information, doing entrepreneurial challenges, going and visiting colleges and universities, and a whole host of other activities.

But unless we have some kind of developmental framework, where we move young people from one of these things to another, rather than them just being a series of, kind of, random activities that happen now and again.; unless we have a sense that people are learning, are gradually developing career management skills, are gradually increasing their knowledge about the world of work; unless we have this, kind of, progressive framework, and an opportunity for people to reflect on what it is they're learning, then it's not going to be effective. I think that this is the kind of thing that we know about education more generally, that we need reflective loops, we need to revisit ideas, we need professionals who can help people to encounter and make sense of the experiences that they have.

So, what we need are well-structured, well-delivered careers education programmes, that build young people's careers management skills. They should start very early, ideally from primary school, but certainly from year seven. I've seen some very interesting programmes where people have thought about the transition from primary to secondary school as something in which you learn quite a lot about transitions, and about who you are in that moment. We should certainly be dealing with careers education that starts in year seven and continues right the way through. And, one of our beliefs, in the International Centre for Guidance Studies is that careers education and guidance should be lifelong processes, because your career is a lifelong process.

Finally I think it's important to recognise that career education and guidance is, what I would call, a multi-professional endeavour. It's not something that just one person can do, it's not something that, if we just bring an employer into our schools they will be able to deliver careers education and guidance on their own. Nor, is it something which I think a single careers adviser can deliver on their own. If we think about all the people who were involved in careers education and guidance when it works well, we have careers professionals, we have teachers, we have senior leaders in schools, we have employers, we have parents, we have alumni of the school, we have post-secondary learning providers, librarians, support staff, teaching assistants, administrators and so on. Bringing all these people together, and helping them to work as an effective team to deliver a career education programme, I think, is an incredibly challenging and highly professional role.

² See <http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/icegs/publications/>.

And, this says nothing, and I'm not going to talk in detail about this, but this says nothing of the highly complex world of support services that exist outside of the school. So, we've got services delivered from the Careers and Enterprise Company, from the National Careers Service, from Job Centre Plus, things that are happening in local authorities, with LEPs, and so on. Schools find this quite challenging to engage with, but actually it offers them lots of resources, if we have the sufficient capacity to understand and make use of all of these different resources.

So, I think this is important, and we can't simplify this completely. Careers are about complexity, and one of the things that we're trying to get young people to do, through a careers education and guidance process, is to encounter some of that complexity and think about their place within it. And, I think, one of the reasons why it's more challenging, and it requires this inter-professional team much more than many other subjects, is because in careers we're studying the world. And, when we're engaging with employers, and we're engaging with visits to university and so on, we're essentially opening up a living text book, and we're drawing out the learning from that.

So, I think, at its best career learning is experiential, it's also personalised, and it enables young people to move forward, to learn more in general about how the world works, but also to think very carefully about their place within it. And, I think that schools need skilled professionals in order to do this, and particularly skilled middle leaders, who are capable of playing the role of linking up all these different stakeholders who we might have.

So, just to conclude, the points that I've been making are that firstly, careers education and guidance is an educational activity, and it is one which is important, and is actually at the heart of what education is about; secondly, if we are going to deliver it well, it needs to be delivered progressively and programmatically; and thirdly that it needs to draw in a wide range of different stakeholders in order to deliver it successfully.