The emerging policy model for career guidance in England: some lessons from international examples

A. G. Watts

The existing international evidence is reviewed in relation to four aspects of the emerging policy model for career guidance in England: an all-age service; revitalising the professionalism of career guidance; the partnership model between schools and an external service; and introducing school commissioning. It is concluded that the first three are supported by the international evidence; but that on the fourth, the evidence is more negative. Evidence is also reviewed in relation to six high-performing countries in terms of school performance. It is concluded that there is no common pattern that characterises the career guidance provision in these countries, but that any devolution of responsibility to schools needs to be accompanied by strong policy levers. These might include measures to assure professional standards, support for school planning and self-evaluation, and in-service training for school heads.

Introduction

The aims of this article are two-fold:

- To review evidence related to the model of career guidance which the current Government is proposing to implement in England
- To identify relevant evidence on career guidance provision from high-performing countries in terms of school performance, as identified in the evidence paper (Department for Education, 2010a) that accompanied the White Paper on *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010b).

These two issues will be covered in turn, and followed by a brief conclusions section.

The article is based on a paper prepared for the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It draws heavily on the linked policy reviews carried out within the last decade by OECD, the World Bank, the European Commission and its agencies, and other organisations, which have covered a total of 55 countries (for a methodological overview, see Watts, 2008). It also draws on other published papers and up-to-date information from expert informants.

Evidence related to the proposed model

The core features of the model of career guidance which the Government has been proposing (for a detailed analysis, see Watts, 2011) are:

- An all-age careers service
- Revitalising the professionalism of career guidance, based on responding positively to the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010)
- For school pupils, placing the partnership model – whereby schools work together with external independent advisers – at the heart of the new arrangements
- Introducing school commissioning: making schools responsible for securing career guidance for their pupils from the all-age careers service or another quality-assured external provider.

The notion of an all-age careers service is supported by the existing international evidence. The

OECD Career Guidance Policy Review pointed out that all-age services have a number of organisational and resource-used advantages. By allowing a diverse range of services to be provided throughout the lifespan within one organisational framework, they are potentially more cost-effective, avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources (OECD, 2004: 144). More recent reviews, benchmarked against the OECD review, of the three major existing examples of all-age services – in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales – have all been very positive (Watts, 2005; 2007; 2009). Together, they indicate that an all-age service has an opportunity to think more broadly and more systematically about the nature and applicability of its professionalism, the allocation of its resources across the whole population, and the links between career guidance and public policy, than is the case with age-segmented services, especially those that are embedded into particular service sectors (e.g. schools). In effect, such a service provides a strong professional spine for a lifelong career guidance system. So long as it recognises that it cannot provide all the career guidance that is needed, and must pay significant attention to supporting embedded career support in educational institutions, in workplaces and in the community, the evidence indicates that it provides a particularly robust base for such a system (Watts, 2010a).

The move towards stronger professionalism, too, is supported by the international evidence. The OECD review recommended that 'the priority for policy-makers in most OECD countries should be to create separate, and appropriate, occupational and organisational structures to deliver career guidance'. It pointed out that:

When it cannot readily be identified as a service that is available in its own right, people will continue to have difficulty in accessing it. And if it is not a separate occupational category, the problems of creating separate and appropriate training arrangements for it will persist. This has implications for the nature and quality of the career guidance services that policy-makers are able to deliver to citizens (OECD, 2004: 102).

More recent international studies have indicated that a number of European countries are now making significant moves towards more specialised training (Cedefop, 2009: 24), and that 'the career guidance sector in many countries is changing as career guidance becomes a separate practice and a distinct occupation, pushing the sector towards professionalisation' (Reid, 2007: 7).

The third feature of the current policy, the partnership model, is again supported by the international evidence. The OECD review indicated the limitations of an exclusively school/college-based model of career guidance delivery, in three respects:

- Its weak links with the labour market, and its tendency to view educational choices as ends in themselves without attention to their longer-term career implications
- Its lack of impartiality, and the tendency for schools to promote their own provision rather than college- or work-based routes
- Its lack of consistency: the policy levers on schools and colleges to deliver services in this area tended to be weak, and services to be patchy both in extent and in quality.

Accordingly, the OECD review strongly favoured a delivery model based on a partnership between schools and colleges on the one hand, and on the other an external service that is closer to the labour market and is able to provide impartial guidance at a consistent standard (OECD, 2004).

On the fourth feature, school commissioning, the evidence is more negative. As noted in an earlier article in this journal (Watts, 2010b), two countries have in recent years implemented reforms in which this was a feature: New Zealand and the Netherlands.

In New Zealand, prior to the mid-1990s, the precursors of what is now Career Services commonly visited schools to interview most if not all school-leavers. In 1996, this was replaced by a structure in which secondary schools received extra funding to enable them to purchase career services from an external provider if they wished to do so. These funds were part of their bulk funds and were not tagged. Schools could use them to purchase external services, to cover internal guidance costs, or for other purposes altogether. A more recent review concluded that most schools used the monies to cover internal

career-related costs or for other unrelated purposes: unpublished Education Review Office data indicated that around two-thirds of secondary schools allocated all of the relevant funding to career education and guidance; of the remainder, half allocated 50-85% to it; the other half allocated 25-50% to it (Watts, 2007). Schools which chose to buy in interviews with all leavers or all students in a particular year were now very much the exception rather than the rule (though some carried out such interview programmes by using their own staff). A report by the Education Review Office (2006) concluded that only 12% of secondary schools provided high-quality career education and guidance to their students. A further 85% were effective in some areas and needed to improve in others.

In the Netherlands, the funding previously allocated to the Advice Offices for Education and Occupation (AOBs in Dutch) was progressively reallocated to schools between 1995 and 2000, as part of a broader policy of marketisation. As a result of this policy, some schools continued to buy services from the AOBs; some switched to other private-sector organisations; some aimed to provide all services internally. The result was that the number of AOBs was reduced from 16 to 4, with considerable loss of expertise, and no evidence of any improvement in services within schools (Meijers, 2001; also OECD, 2002a).

An OECD report on the Netherlands (OECD, 2002a) pointed out that the effect of the reforms had been 'to place purchasing power in relation to guidance services in the hands not of the demand side but of the supply side: not of individuals but of institutions with their own agendas and priorities'. The issue was 'whether such agendas and priorities are necessarily and invariably congruent with the interests of individuals and with the wider public good'. There were two problems in particular with devolving decisions on career information and guidance provision to institutions:

The first is that it leaves such provision at the mercy of management priorities. Some managers may see guidance as being very important for the institution and its students; some may not. The latter is particularly likely to be the case where, as in the Netherlands, external pressures on institutional priorities focus heavily on output measures based on examination performance, rather than on process measures or longer-term outcome measures. In this situation, the system tends to be viewed in management terms as a closed box, and guidance linked to individual progression outside this box as being of peripheral importance.

The second potential problem is closely related: it is the issue of impartiality. The funding of educational institutions is linked to enrolments and/or course completions, and this may incline them to restrict the guidance they offer. Thus an employers' representative suggested to us that educational institutions were more interested in filling their courses than with giving good advice to students on the realities of labour-market demand. Again, an external agency reported that a couple of schools had cancelled their contracts because it had advised some students that it might be in their best interests to leave the school and move elsewhere (OECD, 2002a: 11).

Both of these two points seem likely to apply in England. There is strong evidence that within schools which extend beyond the age of 16, guidance tends to favour their own provision post-16 at the expense of other options (see e.g. Foskett, Dyke and Maringe, 2004). The proposal in the Education Bill 2011 (clause 27) to introduce a new statutory duty for schools to 'secure that all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance' between the ages of 14 and 16 – with 'independent' being defined as being provided by persons other than those employed at the school – appears to protect against this by effectively preventing schools from providing professional career guidance internally. Subsequent 'clarifications', however, suggest that this may not be the case (Watts, 2011). Even if it were, the Dutch evidence suggests that strong quality assurance would be needed if the possibility of informal pressures on the impartiality of external agencies was to be avoided. More broadly, the international evidence suggests that strong policy levers will be needed if schools in general are to 'invest' significantly in independent career guidance for their pupils.

These points are all the more important in the light of recent developments which suggest that the DfE contribution to the allegedly all-age National

Careers Service is likely to be confined wholly to web-based and telephone-based services, without any discernible transfer of career guidance funding to schools (Watts, 2011). If this proves to be the case, the reality will be that the existing notional funding for face-to-face career guidance services for young people under Connexions has not just been pruned in line with general cuts in public expenditure, but has been allowed to disappear altogether – without any public announcement to this effect. It should be noted that in the two countries which have previously adopted school commissioning (Netherlands and New Zealand), discernible funding was provided for the schools to buy in such services if they wished (OECD, 2002a, p.5; Watts, 2007, p.42): if this is not to be the case now in England, this suggests that the significant reductions in the extent and quality of career guidance provision that subsequently took place in both of these countries are likely to be much greater here. It also means that the partnership model which the Government has affirmed will have been effectively abandoned and dismantled, and that the claim that the National Careers Service is genuinely all-age becomes highly questionable.

Since the core rationale for these policies is based on the Government's adherence to the principle of school autonomy, and since the justification for this is based heavily on the international evidence in relation to pupil attainment cited in *The Case for Change* (Department for Education, 2010a), this attaches even greater importance to the question of whether or not the evidence from high-performing countries supports equally the application of these policies in relation to the support provided for pupil career choices and transitions. This will be discussed next.

Evidence from high-performing countries (in terms of school performance)

On the basis of the discussion in *The Case for Change* (Department for Education, 2010a), six high-performing countries in terms of school performance were selected: Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Sweden. In view of the focus here, the career guidance provision reviewed in these countries was confined to that for school pupils.

In Canada, guidance programmes have traditionally been based on the role of the guidance counsellor. In most provinces, guidance counsellors are licensed teachers who usually also have a graduate qualification in guidance and counselling: this may, however, include little or no specific attention to career development and career counselling, focusing instead on psychological issues; they tend also to devote much of their time to responding to students' personal problems. Attention to career education and work experience varies across the provinces (OECD, 2002b; for more recent evidence, see Malatest and Associates, 2009). Strengths include the development of creative career education resources (notably The Real Game, which has been successfully used in the UK (Edwards, Barnes, Killeen and Watts, 1999)) and of strategic instruments (notably the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs, a framework for developing career management skills both in and beyond schools, which is currently being adapted for use in both England (LSIS, 2009) and Scotland (Hooley, Watts, Sultana and Neary, 2011)). In Ontario, at the time of the OECD survey, school principals were required not only to produce a comprehensive guidance and career education plan, but also every three years to conduct surveys of students, parents, teachers and other partners to evaluate the delivery and effectiveness of all components of the programme (OECD, 2002b). In Alberta, a Connecting Learning and Work programme launched in 2009 includes partnership working to support career development from kindergarten to grade 12.[1]

In Finland, the career guidance system is strongly professionalised by international standards. All comprehensive schools have at least one full-time-equivalent counsellor, who has normally had a five-year training as a teacher, plus teaching experience, followed by a one-year specialist training; alternatively, guidance can be selected as an option within the five-year initial teacher training. Their role includes individual career counselling, and running guidance classes focusing on careers education and study skills. In addition, most pupils have at least two one-week work-experience placements. Alongside this, pupils have access to career guidance provided by vocational psychologists

[1] www.employment.alberta.ca/documents/CES/CES-CLW_strategy.pdf

within the Ministry of Labour: they have had six years' training as psychologists, plus a 55-day specialist vocational training (OECD, 1996). Some powers have been devolved to municipalities and to schools, in relation to resource allocation and curriculum content. Nonetheless, there have been clear guidelines for comprehensive and upper secondary schools, specifying the minimum level of guidance services permissible, together with a web-based service to support institutional self-evaluation of guidance services. Steps have also been taken to embed guidance policy issues in national in-service training programmes for school principals (Vuorinen, Kasurinen and Merimaa, 2003). Guidance is a compulsory subject within the curriculum, and each school must produce a plan indicating how the relevant goals are to be reached both by all teachers and by the school counsellors (Vuorinen, 2011).

In Hong Kong, the educational system was modelled after the British system though is now undergoing substantial changes. The career guidance services are located within schools, and based on teams of five to six teachers led by a senior teacher who holds the title of careers master/mistress and spends around five hours per week on guidance work; the others carry a full teaching load in other subjects. Their training is limited, confined to access to an introductory course in career development and counselling. Their programmes have tended to rely on careers talks and visits, though a career education curriculum on which schools can draw if they wish has been developed by the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters. Some use is made of external careers services provided by the Labour Department and by non-governmental organisations (Leung, 2002; Ho, 2008).

In Korea, the main guidance specialist in schools is the guidance counsellor, who is a qualified teacher with (usually) additional specialist training. Their role covers not only educational and career guidance but also counselling on personal and behavioural issues. Most guidance delivery is provided by the homeroom teachers (tutors). In practice, most of it is focused around college entrance, and particularly which colleges and fields of study to apply for. Such guidance is informed largely by school marks and aptitude/interest test results, and in the past has appeared in general to pay little or no attention to clarifying longer-term career aspirations (though this may be beginning to change in the light of data on college drop-outs and course changes). Vocational counsellors from the public employment services commonly visit schools to administer psychometric tests and run group sessions to help pupils interpret the results. Some career education programmes have been introduced, but on a voluntary basis, and with little training support for the teachers involved; opportunities for pupils to experience the world of work are limited (OECD, 2002c). More recently, a Career Education Division has been established in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; efforts are being made to integrate career education elements into mainstream schools subjects; 'career and school entrance teachers' are being appointed in each of the middle-high schools; and awareness of career education and guidance is being included in national in-service programmes for school principals (Lee, 2011).

In Singapore, a system of pastoral care and career guidance was introduced into schools between 1987 and 1995, which drew strongly from UK school-based models (Watts, 1988), viewed as part of efforts to make the education system more 'efficient'. The model was based more on career education than on career counselling. It included a programme of 'affective and career education' (ACE) delivered in curriculum periods at least once a week, usually by form teachers. In addition, subject teachers were expected to incorporate career education in their teaching; and a fair number of schools appointed careers teachers to provide planned group guidance sessions and some face-to-face career counselling. Subsequently, the careers teacher became viewed more as a co-ordinator of a more broadly based careers programme. There was also a stronger emphasis on individualised guidance, as part of a policy of implementing an 'ability-driven' education that sought to develop the full spectrum of talents and abilities in every child in school. This included more advanced training programmes for careers teachers (Tan, 2002). More recently, a developmental programme of Education and Career Guidance (ECG) has been introduced, with primary schools focusing on career awareness, secondary schools on career exploration, and upper secondary schools on career planning. This is delivered through a variety of means,

including career education lessons, counselling, talks, clinics, visits, work experience/shadowing, projects, e-resources and career portfolios.[2] In addition, each school now has a school counsellor plus teacher-counsellors, who may provide some career counselling to pupils.[3]

In Sweden, the system of career guidance has since the 1970s been based on school-based 'study and vocational orientation counsellors'. They were not teachers, but had specialist training comprising a three-year undergraduate course (those with a number of years' work experience could qualify through a 1.5-year course); after 1989 they were employed by, and ultimately accountable to, their municipality. Their role included individual career counselling, group guidance, organising work experience, acting as a resource to teachers, following up former pupils, and liaising with the employment service (which provides some limited support) (Watts, 1981). Following the decentralisation that took place in the 1990s, many municipalities have devolved decisions on the nature of provision to schools. The training requirement has been weakened, with many schools assigning teachers without specialist training to carry out career guidance tasks (especially in the publicly-funded 'free schools'). Moreover, counsellors are increasingly assigned marketing tasks, to promote their schools in the emerging school market (Lundahl and Nilsson, 2009). New legislation has recently been introduced to ensure that all pupils have access to guidance provided by a trained and qualified career guidance practitioner. Several municipalities are also setting up guidance centres where counsellors are based and from which they visit schools (Mjörnheden, 2011).

It is evident that there is no common pattern that characterises the career guidance provision for school pupils in these countries:

- In some cases, they are exclusively school-based (Canada, Singapore); in others, there is access to external services (Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, Sweden)
- In some cases, they are highly professionalised in terms of career guidance expertise (notably in Finland and Sweden); in others, less so
- In some cases, the key specialist guidance roles are generic, covering personal and social as well as educational and vocational guidance (Canada, Korea); in others, they focus more specifically on career guidance (Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sweden)
- In most of these cases, the specialists have been trained initially as teachers; but in Sweden, they usually have not
- In some cases, there is a systematic developmental careers education programme (Canada [Alberta], Finland, Singapore); in others, any such provision is less systematic (Hong Kong, Korea, Sweden)
- In some cases, such programmes systematically include work experience/shadowing (Finland, Singapore, Sweden); in others, they sometimes do so (Canada); in yet others (Hong Kong, Korea), they rarely do so (though this may be beginning to change).

There are no data which enable firm conclusions to be drawn on the impact of these different models on pupil attainment, progression and employment prospects, or on other quantifiable success measures. There is evidence elsewhere to demonstrate a relationship between clarity of career goals and educational attainment (Inter-Ed, 2004). There is also a strong theoretical basis for the effect of careers education and guidance on attainment and associated behaviour (Killeen, Sammons and Watts, 1999). This is supported by some US studies on the impact of more broadly-based guidance programmes on pupil performance (see e.g. Lapan, Gysbers and Sun, 1997).

A number of other features in these international examples would seem relevant to current policy developments in England. These include:

- The need to avoid the risk that devolution of responsibility for career guidance to schools will result in erosion of specialist professional guidance roles (Sweden)
- The desirability of requiring schools to produce a plan for careers education and guidance delivery, together with provision

[2] http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/social-emotional-learning/education-career-guidance/
[3] http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/social-emotional-learning/education-career-guidance/

for school self-evaluation (Canada [Ontario], Finland)

- The desirability of including career guidance policy issues in national in-service training programmes for school principals (Finland, Korea)
- The notion that a developmental careers education programme should start in primary schools (Canada [Alberta], Singapore) (for recent English evidence to support this, see Wade et al, 2011).

Conclusions

This brief international review has indicated strong support for three main features of current Government policy for career guidance in England: an all-age careers service; enhancing the professionalism of career guidance practitioners; and the partnership model between schools and an external service.

On devolution of responsibility for career guidance to schools, the evidence is more negative. It suggests that for such a policy to be successful, strong policy levers will be needed. These should include – but not necessarily be confined to – measures to assure professional standards, support for school planning and self-evaluation, and in-service training for school heads. Since the policy for school autonomy as outlined in *The Case for Change* (Department for Education, 2010a) is based heavily on international evidence, it is important that the contrasting international evidence presented in this paper be given similar prominence in formulating policy in relation to career guidance provision.

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