

OECD REVIEW OF CAREER GUIDANCE POLICIES



UNITED KINGDOM

COUNTRY NOTE

April 2003

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1. Introduction

1. As part of the OECD review of career guidance¹ policies, a national visit to the United Kingdom took place between 8 April and 17 April 2002². The visit included meetings with policy makers from the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions, meetings with researchers and those responsible for training career guidance workers, meetings with leaders of national career guidance representative organisations, and visits to career guidance services for youth and for adults, to schools, to tertiary institutions at both university and Further Education college level, and to a public employment service office (known in the United Kingdom as a Jobcentre Plus). The visit also provided the opportunity to observe workplace guidance and guidance using call centre technology. As part of the visit a one-day national seminar was held at which many of the key players in career guidance in the United Kingdom were able to debate a number of central policy issues. While the majority of the visit took place in England, one day was spent in Wales. The programme of the visit can be found in Appendix 1.

2. Prior to the visit the United Kingdom³ completed detailed national questionnaires for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, as well as a briefer document that addressed a number of the legal and constitutional matters that underpin United Kingdom arrangements for career guidance⁴.

3. This Country Note describes the nature of national arrangements for career guidance in the United Kingdom (except Scotland, which did not take part in the review for reasons outlined in footnote 4) and outlines some key policy issues in the provision of career guidance in the United Kingdom.

2. The United Kingdom context

2.1 *Some features of the economy, labour market and education system*

4. The United Kingdom has, and increasingly so, many of the features of a country with a federal system of government. Three of its constituent countries -- Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland -- have in recent years been given their own parliaments or assemblies, and these, within overall frameworks determined by the national parliament, are able to enact legislation which gives aspects of government services features that are distinctive compared to those in England. England, however, does not have its own parliament that is separated from the national parliament.

5. With a population approaching 60 million⁵, the United Kingdom is one of the larger countries in the OECD, and its GDP per capita is marginally above the average of the OECD (US\$25 400 in 2001

1. In the United Kingdom the term “information, advice and guidance” is commonly used to refer to the diverse range of services being examined under the term “career guidance” in the OECD review as a whole.

2. The review visit was undertaken by Mr Richard Sweet from the OECD secretariat. At the last moment health reasons prevented Professor Peter Plant from the Danish University of Education from participating.

3. The United Kingdom consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. England, Scotland and Wales constitute Great Britain.

4. Because a new national all-age career guidance service had been established in Scotland in April 2002, Scotland felt it that it would have been premature to provide a national questionnaire or to take part in the national visit.

compared to US\$24 600 for the OECD as a whole). During the decade of the 1990s economic growth was about the same as the OECD average, at 2.7% for the 1991-2001 period, although in the 2000-2001 period it was slightly more than double the OECD average (2.2% compared to 1.0%)⁶.

6. The labour market of the United Kingdom has a number of features that distinguish it from that of other OECD countries. At 23% of the total labour force, the incidence of part-time employment is around half again as great as in the OECD as a whole, and the female labour force participation rate is somewhat above the OECD average. At 5.5% in 2000, the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom was below the OECD average of 6.2%, and well below the EU average of 8.4%. However recent success in reducing unemployment queues has helped to direct attention to the broader issues of dependency upon welfare payments, and this has helped to drive recent changes both in benefit administration and in the delivery of employment and welfare services. In turn this is related to a wider concern by the current government to address the issue of social exclusion⁷.

7. Compared to many other OECD countries, the labour market of the United Kingdom is a very flexible one. Levels of employment protection are relatively low: it is relatively easy for employers both to hire and to fire; and limitations placed upon the operation of private employment agencies are few⁸. Another indication of the flexibility of the United Kingdom labour market is that many students work. Nearly 45% of all teenage students in the United Kingdom are in the labour market, compared to an OECD average of only around one in five, and half of all 20-24 year-old students have a job, compared to an OECD average of only around one third⁹.

8. Whilst participation in all forms of education has expanded in the United Kingdom in recent years, historically attainment levels have been towards the lower third of the OECD distribution as a whole: in 2001 68% of the 25-34 year-olds had completed upper secondary education, compared to 74% in the OECD as a whole. Addressing these attainment levels, both by increasing the proportion of young people who complete an upper secondary education, and by addressing the needs of adults with low basic skills and an incomplete secondary education, has been a key priority for the current government.

9. Although improving national levels of educational attainment has been a strong concern in recent United Kingdom policy, United Kingdom 15 year-olds' results on PISA, which assesses levels of educational achievement rather than qualifications attainment, were significantly above the OECD average on each of the combined literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy scales¹⁰.

10. An additional important feature, for present purposes, of the United Kingdom education system, is its considerable flexibility and the wide opportunities that it offers for individual choice¹¹. Increasingly government policy is favouring greater diversity within qualifications, with tight distinctions between

5. Of the total population around 5.1 million live in Scotland, 3 million in Wales, and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland. Some 84% of the population, then, lives in England.

6. Source: OECD (2002) *OECD in Figures*, Paris.

7. See, for example Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment and Training*, Cabinet Office, London.

8. OECD (1999) *Employment Outlook*, Paris.

9. OECD (2002) *Education at Glance: OECD Indicators*, Paris.

10. OECD (2001) *Knowledge and Skills for Life. First Results from PISA 2000*, Paris.

11. See OECD (1999) *Thematic Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life. Country Note: United Kingdom*, Paris.

general and vocational pathways becoming blurred. The introduction of new (broader and more flexible) curriculum and qualification structures will put increasing pressure upon schools to provide students with good advice on subject choice and the implications of this for later educational and occupational decisions. Pathways through upper secondary education offer young people the choice between different types of institutions for gaining similar types of qualifications -- schools and Further Education colleges are the main choice -- and choice between both general education qualifications and vocational qualifications. After the age of 16, the principal choices of qualification facing young people are studying for A-levels, studying for a GNVQ or General National Vocational Qualification, training for an NVQ or National Vocational Qualification, or getting a Modern Apprenticeship. Young people may also, after the end of compulsory schooling, choose between work-based and institution-based routes to acquiring qualifications, and well-established formal qualifications are awarded by a number of non-government agencies as well as by government bodies.

11. Competency-based qualifications, modular systems of training and an emphasis upon the accreditation of knowledge and skills gained through experience are among the mechanisms that are commonly used to, among other purposes, make re-entry into education easier for those who leave early.

12. The tertiary education system is also a diverse one, with widely different types of institutions, and a policy atmosphere that encourages competition and choice between institutions. Young people who complete their upper secondary education are encouraged to take a year off from study -- referred to as a Gap Year -- before starting tertiary education in order to travel, to develop foreign language skills, to do voluntary work or to undertake other personal development activities, and significant institutional support is offered for this¹².

13. The United Kingdom education system is also one in which change -- in structures, in administrative arrangements, in qualification systems, in the pathways available to students -- is a regular feature¹³.

2.2 *The United Kingdom's system for career guidance*

14. Compared to most other OECD countries, career guidance is very highly developed in the United Kingdom. It is available widely across sectors of education and the labour market, as well as in community settings. It is provided in a diverse range of ways. One of its most distinctive characteristics is that it has a very highly developed set of institutional support arrangements: a strong legislative base that includes both obligations upon providers and individual entitlements; harmonised representative organisations for career guidance practitioners; quality standards that have more than a voluntary application; policy advice and co-ordination mechanisms; training and qualification frameworks; lobby groups; political support; and research and evaluation support. Career guidance in the United Kingdom is also noticeable for the significant change and innovation that has occurred in recent years.

15. Both the well-developed nature of career guidance in the United Kingdom and recent change and innovation reflect many of the contextual features of the United Kingdom referred to in Section 2.1 above: flexibility within the labour market; diversity, flexibility and frequent change within education systems and pathways; an emphasis upon individual choice; recent policy initiatives to improve educational attainment,

12. See for example the DFES web site <http://www.yearoutgroup.org/> as well as other web sites such as <http://www.gapyear.com/> and <http://www.gap-year.com/>.

13. See Wolf, A. (2002) *Does Education Matter? Myths about Education and Economic Growth*, Penguin Books, London, for a detailed outline of many changes to the United Kingdom qualification system in recent years.

reduce welfare dependency, and address social exclusion; and increasing divergence in the ways in which some government services are provided in the constituent countries.

16. The very wide range and the diversity of career guidance services in the United Kingdom make it impossible to provide a succinct summary of all of them. In particular, those that exist in the private sector and the non-government sector are not easy to map. Below the principal government services are described.

2.2.1 *Historical background*

17. For many years the principal national agency for the provision of career guidance in the United Kingdom was the Careers Service. Through local authorities it provided career guidance to people of all ages, although its services tended to be concentrated mainly upon young people in the final years of schooling. In part this focus upon youth was the result of 1993 legislation which imposed a statutory obligation upon the Careers Service to provide career guidance to all young people from age 13 in full-time education (outside higher education); to part-time students in work-related further education; and to young people aged under 21 who had left full-time education up to two years previously.

18. Between 1991 and 1995 the Careers Service in England, Scotland and Wales was “privatised”, with contracts to offer the service being awarded by government on a local basis by a competitive tendering process. However whilst the employment status of those who provided the service changed, in many respects its fundamental features remained the same: a service that largely concentrated upon providing career guidance to those in their final year(s) of school; a service largely provided through individual interviews with its clients; and a service that was basically similar in England, Scotland and Wales.

19. From 1998 onwards what is often referred to as the “focusing agenda”, which flowed from the government’s concern to address the needs of those young people most at risk in the transition from school to work, resulted in Careers Services being required to focus their work with young people upon groups defined as being most in need. These included both young people neither in work nor in learning, and those in education who were deemed most at risk of not remaining in learning. The shift in government priorities resulted in career education and guidance provision being highest in areas of higher socio-economic deprivation and in schools with poorer academic results. This can be seen as a positive outcome, but research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) showed that at the same time it led to concern on the part of career guidance practitioners and schools that what had previously been seen as a service offering universal entitlements might lead to some diminution of service to those not falling within priority groups¹⁴. This concern seems to have been particularly strong in England. In Wales additional funds were provided to meet the government’s social inclusion priorities and a separate programme known as the Youth Gateway (see Box 1) was established in 1999 to supplement, rather than set new priorities for, existing services.

2.2.2 *Connexions*

20. In April 2001 the government’s expressed desire to improve the range of support services to young people at risk resulted in the introduction of the Connexions Service, for all 13-19 year-olds, to

14. See Morris, M., Rickinson, M. and Davies, D. (2001) *The Delivery of Career Guidance in Schools, Research Report No. 296*, Department for Education and Skills.

replace the Careers Service¹⁵. Connexions contracts were awarded to local partnerships or consortia that were able to demonstrate that they could meet government-set criteria. The new service is confined to England.

21. Connexions has a number of features that distinguish it from previous arrangements:

- Its range of services is considerably broader than career guidance. It is intended to include the full range of support services needed by young people in the transition from school. These could include, in addition to career guidance, help with issues as diverse as teenage pregnancy, financial advice, housing, and drug problems. Connexions also advertises itself as providing information and access to personal development opportunities such as community service and volunteering, and specialist advice and services to remove barriers to participation in learning;
- It introduces changes in nomenclature, both of the service and of those who provide it, which less clearly identify it as a specialised career guidance service. The service itself no longer has the word “careers” in its title, and those who provide it are now normally called Personal Advisers rather than Careers Advisers;
- All Personal Advisers are required to undertake a special training course that focuses upon the generic competences required in working with young people and in working with a range of agencies. However it is not a requirement that all must have or work towards a specialised qualification in career guidance, although some Connexions services require some of their staff to have both types of qualification;
- Its focus is upon young people¹⁶, and separate services are being developed for adults (see below).
- Coinciding with the introduction of Connexions there has been a growing divergence between the ways in which career guidance is provided in the individual parts of the United Kingdom. Wales, for example, has introduced a new national all-age careers service that operates under the title of Careers Wales, and has not accepted the separate focus upon youth or the “branding” of the service in a way that excludes the term careers that exists in England (see Box 1)¹⁷.

15. In some areas Careers Service companies have continued to trade as Careers Services, providing career guidance on a sub-contractual basis to Connexions partnerships. However to all intents and purposes Connexions has subsumed the previous Careers Service.

16. However the focus upon young people is not always an exclusive one. For example the August 2002 issue of the Institute of Career Guidance’s job vacancy bulletin *Portico* contains an advertisement from the Greater Mersyside Connexions service for Personal Advisers to work as part of an adult guidance team. And in some cases Connexions services continue (as Careers Services did previously) to provide career guidance for adults, but fund this from other sources.

17. At the time of the national visit Northern Ireland had not announced its intentions in this respect, but representatives of Northern Ireland at the seminar held during the national visit announced that they were inclining towards the Welsh model rather than the English. Scotland has also recently introduced an all-age model of career guidance provision, but this does not form part of the focus of this Country Note. Again, although youth services as such are not the focus of this Country Note, Wales has chosen to co-ordinate separate services though arrangements at the local level, rather than to set up an integrated service with multiple roles.

22. In the career guidance aspects of its work, Connexions works in a range of ways. The time of the review visit was one of transition between the old arrangements and the new. It seemed as if some Connexions services were, for this part of their work, operating in ways that were quite similar to those adopted previously i.e. negotiating agreements with schools to provide one-to-one interviews for students (though now on a more selective basis). However some were also, as under the Careers Service, operating in a range of more varied and innovative ways. In addition to providing one-to-one interviews for school and Further Education college students, some services provide extensive curriculum support to schools in implementing their career education programmes, and support in providing them with employer contacts and work experience placements.

23. In order to give priority to the needs of those at risk, but also meet the needs of all young people, some are providing a much more differentiated service than in the past: for example using group interviews much more extensively and focusing personal interviews upon those at risk; and making much more extensive use of ICT and other self-help methods. In some cases this has been a positive outcome of the earlier requirement to focus assistance upon those most at risk. In other cases such developments have occurred independently. Some services -- for example the Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions service -- have established innovative "one stop shops" that include a range of information resources and self-help services, with screening tools being used to allocate more intensive services to those in most need, and others are planning to do so¹⁸.

24. The introduction of Connexions has not been not without controversy. Concerns that the pre-Connexions "focusing agenda" was resulting in a diminution of career guidance services to those not deemed to be "at risk" initially spilled over into concerns that the same might be institutionalised under Connexions. To address these concerns the government required that there be no reduction, as a result of its introduction, in the quantity or quality of existing information, advice or guidance services provided to young people¹⁹. In its early thinking on the nature of the new service, the government had considered that it should provide all young people between the ages of 13 and 19 with a personal adviser, and there were concerns expressed about the practicality and resource implications of such an intention. These resulted in the government making it clear that Connexions was to be a "universal" service, but with a special focus upon those most at risk. Career guidance representative organisations, as well as individuals prominent in the field of career guidance, expressed concern about the balance between the two, and also about the weakening of the career guidance "brand name": the possibility that it might henceforth not be regarded by the general public as a separate and readily identifiable service, and that the specialised knowledge and skills built up over an extended period by the Careers Service might be reduced. These concerns had been fuelled by the perception of some careers and Connexions staff that specialist careers qualifications are not being encouraged under the new arrangements, and that there had been insufficient appreciation of the specialised knowledge base and competences required to provide career guidance. Some of the implications of these concerns will be discussed later in this Country Note.

18. A similar adaptation to new or increased demands with constant or reduced resources was seen during the national visit at the University of Leicester Careers Service and at Careers Wales, with an apparent outcome of more flexible tailoring of services to individual need.

19. In its evaluation of the first year of Connexions partnerships the government's Office for Standards in Education (roughly the equivalent of an education inspectorate in other countries) commented that in many schools there had been a "welcome return" from the concentration of services upon those most at need that had been observed earlier (under the "focusing agenda"). See Office for Standards in Education (2002) *Connexions Partnerships: The First Year 2001-2002*, HMI 521.

2.2.3 Career guidance provided by school themselves

25. One of the strengths of the United Kingdom approach to career guidance for young people in schools has traditionally been the support that schools receive from an external agency. This can help both to ensure that advice and guidance are not too education-bound and have a strong foot in the labour market, and also that advice and guidance are independent of the interests of the institution itself. However the real strength lies in the partnership between the school and the external agency, and the shared roles and expertise that result from this. A role for the school, as well as an external agency, can help to ensure that the overall approach to career guidance is developmental, curriculum-based, and includes an element of structured experience.

26. In addition to the entitlement provided in United Kingdom legislation for all young people to receive career guidance (see Section 2.2.1 above), the 1997 Education Act made it a requirement that all schools should provide a minimum programme of career education and ensure that all young people, from the age of 13, have access to impartial career guidance²⁰. In early 2003 the government announced that career education would be provided from age 11. One significant aspect of the provision of career education and guidance in the United Kingdom is that all schools are required to have an accessible careers library that contains up-to-date information on career opportunities and on post-16 opportunities for further learning such as colleges and training providers²¹. This seems to be unique among OECD countries.

27. While there is a legislative requirement for career education to be provided, the exact nature of this has not been specified, other than through guidelines issued to schools. As a result, significant diversity can be observed in the ways in which schools actually implement career education programmes. In some cases it is a separate and clearly identified element in the curriculum; in some cases it is integrated into another subject (most commonly Personal, Social and Health Education); in others it is systematically integrated into the whole programme of the school; in others it is given little time and accorded a very low priority and status. In most cases there is a strong and well organised experiential component, involving work experience placements or community-based projects; in some it is largely classroom-based. In some cases students are given formal credit for their career education; in others they are not. Similarly, the qualifications and training of the teachers who provide or co-ordinate career education vary widely, with many having no specialised training. It has been estimated that perhaps half of all schools have a good or high level of provision of career education and guidance, although well over 90% of schools make some career education and guidance provision for students in years 9 to 11²², and that around one third of teachers involved in career education and guidance hold a relevant qualification²³.

28. Despite these indicators of variability, the level of resources provided within schools for career education and guidance (accommodation; information material; ICT; staffing; qualification and training levels) is in general significantly higher in the United Kingdom than in many other OECD countries.

29. In Northern Ireland there is no statutory provision for career education in schools, and neither is there a prescribed programme. As a result there is wide variation between schools in how career education

20. Note that the Education Act 1997 also requires Further Education Colleges to provide students with access to a wide range of career information, and to provide premises and access to students for Careers Service (now Connexions) staff.

21. A 1998 survey suggested that at the time 90% of schools had a dedicated careers library, although in perhaps one in four schools the quality of the library was not satisfactory.

22. See Morris, M., Rickinson, M. and Davies, D., (2001) op. cit..

23. Barnes, A., Donoghue, J., and Sadler, J. (2003) "Improving careers education: An analysis of recent research and inspection findings", *Career Research and Development*, No. 7, pp. 3-15.

is provided, although a 1998 survey showed that around 70% of schools provide career education. However schools are required to have an accessible careers library. There are 90 or so Careers Officers in Northern Ireland who are employed by the central government of Northern Ireland, and who provide a service to schools, and further education colleges, largely through personal interviews provided at key decision points²⁴.

2.2.4 *Career guidance in the public employment service*

30. In April 2002 Great Britain's Employment Service and the Benefits Agency²⁵, which administered income support for the unemployed and those on welfare benefits, were merged into a single agency. Managed by the Department for Work and Pensions, operationally the services of the merged organisations are provided through centres now known as Jobcentre Plus, to reflect the integration of employment and benefit administration roles²⁶. The merger reflected the government's concern at high levels of welfare dependency, and its desire to address both this and social exclusion through an increased focus upon work and an improved access to employment.

31. Jobcentre Plus is an important provider of career guidance in Great Britain. It plays a significant role in large part through the New Deal programmes, where unemployed people can be referred to specialised career guidance through contracted provision. It will also refer those not eligible for the New Deal to IAG partnerships (see below) for career guidance. Unlike some other OECD countries, the public employment service is not, itself, a direct provider of more intensive career guidance for those who need it. However the role of personal advisers in the delivery of active labour market policies such as the New Deal, where certain categories of benefit recipients are required to participate in personal action planning, means that often the boundary between "advice" and referral for more in-depth career guidance can be a fluid one. Certainly the need for guidance skills in front line staff increases under such active welfare to work and labour market policies, compared to services in which vacancy matching and benefit administration assume the major role. And so many of the front line staff of Jobcentre Plus would be providing career guidance without necessarily recognising that they are doing so.

32. New, more modern and more attractive service centres have been established as a result of the creation of Jobcentre Plus, including easily accessible touch screen terminals that can be used to find job vacancy information.

33. Jobcentre Plus has no formal requirement to meet external quality standards, such as those against which accreditation is awarded by the Guidance Accreditation Board²⁷, in providing career guidance. However, consistent with the strong and formalised emphasis that is generally placed upon the provision of career guidance in the United Kingdom, pilots were underway at the time of the national visit

24 . Hopkins, L. (2002) Career Guidance in Northern Ireland. A Service in Transition, Institute of Career Guidance Briefing Paper.

25 . Those parts of it that dealt with working-age people.

26 . Unlike other areas of career guidance, the basic frameworks and delivery methods of Jobcentre Plus vary little between Great Britain's constituent countries.

27 . Referred to since April 2002 as the matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance services, or more succinctly as the matrix, these were administered on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills by the Guidance Council up until 1 April 2003. After 1 April 2003 they will be administered by the Employment National Training Organisation. Accreditation of organisations against the standard is awarded by the Guidance Accreditation Board.

to assess the feasibility and benefits of accreditation. In addition, an internal Quality Assurance Framework has been developed to be used in the development and appraisal of front line staff.

2.2.5 *Career guidance for adults*

34. Career guidance for adults is available in a very diverse range of settings in the United Kingdom, and is provided in a diverse range of ways. In addition to the public employment service and the services that are described below, career guidance for adults is available in a range of community and voluntary settings; in organisations such as prisons, health centres and social services; in Local Authorities; and in the private sector, both within enterprises for their employees and by private firms that provide career guidance for a fee, either to the general public or under contract to enterprises: for example to provide outplacement services. Adults also receive career guidance from some Connexions services and from surviving Careers Services, which provide it using funds from sources other than their main contract to provide support to young people: for example the European Social Fund; or fees charged to employers. The extent of these diverse services has not been well mapped, and an indication of their scale and nature was not able to be provided for the national questionnaires. Mapping the real scale and nature of adult guidance in the United Kingdom has important policy implications. These are discussed in Section 3.3 below.

IAG partnerships

35. The need for career guidance for adults to be expanded and improved was highlighted in a 1998 report by the then Department for Education and Employment *The Learning Age*. An important initiative flowing from that report was the creation in 1999 of local Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) partnerships. Operational and funding responsibility for the 75 IAG partnerships now rests with the Learning and Skills Council, rather than the Department for Education and Skills. IAG partnerships are locally based, and receive government funds on a basis that is linked to the number of adults in that area. In order to receive funds, IAG partnerships must be able to demonstrate that they have been accredited against the matrix quality standard (see footnote 27). Partners normally include a range of public, private, voluntary and community organisations. Partnerships are required to co-operate effectively with the public employment service, and to have effective local arrangements for referral and information sharing. They are regarded as a key element in the government's strategy to address social exclusion and to increase adult access to learning, particularly among the low-qualified.

36. While partnerships must adhere to national priorities in targeting their services (for example groups such as those with low levels of initial education; those in remote and isolated areas; ex-offenders; and those for whom English is not their first language) they are also able to target their services to reflect local need. This flexibility is an important feature of their operation.

37. In a comparative context, IAG partnerships are of interest for a number of reasons. They have clear targets for their services that reflect government priorities; they must be able to monitor the characteristics of their clients to demonstrate that they are adhering to these targets; they must demonstrate that they meet national quality standards in order to receive government funds; and they adopt many innovative approaches to delivery. These include a strong emphasis upon outreach services rather than requiring clients to make appointments at central offices, peripatetic delivery, and the use of ICT for client monitoring and tracking, in addition to its use for service delivery.

38. In Wales career guidance for adults is not delivered by separate adult-focused services, but through the all-age services of the seven Careers Wales companies (see Box 1). In many ways the mode of operation of these companies in dealing with adults appears similar to that of the IAG partnerships: locally

responsive; flexible; and using peripatetic and outreach methods. Careers Wales companies can also subcontract services to voluntary organisations that meet required quality standards in order to reach the most disadvantaged.

39. In Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning's Careers Officers in principle provide an all age service, but in practice resource constraints largely confine their work to youth²⁸. The Educational Guidance Service for Adults, which is an independent voluntary organisation, is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning, provides information, advice and guidance on learning opportunities to those aged 19 and over, and largely focuses its services upon the unemployed.

learndirect²⁹

40. learndirect is a highly innovative approach to meeting the career guidance needs of adults. Its methods of operation are strikingly different from traditional methods based upon 30 minute personal interviews that require clients to make appointments and visit specialised career guidance centres. Launched in 1998, its core is built around call centre technology. There are two call centres in England (in Manchester and Leicester), one for Northern Ireland, and smaller centres in Scotland and Wales. learndirect is funded through the University for Industry (Ufi)³⁰. Its underlying goal is to offer free and impartial advice that can assist adults to access further education and training opportunities. To support advice and information on learning opportunities, learndirect provides information on funding for learning and on childcare. learndirect is open to all adults, but like a number of other recent initiatives in the United Kingdom, it focuses upon adults with low levels of qualifications. Call centre help lines are open between 8.00 and 22.00, 365 days a year. This makes the service accessible well outside of standard business hours, and makes it easily accessible by groups such as prisoners, those of no fixed abode, foreign students, the isolated, and asylum seekers. Over five million people have called learndirect since it was opened.

41. The mode of operation means that staff have to be prepared to do shift work. In addition, around a quarter of all staff work part-time. Call centres are staffed by Information Advisers who act as the first point of contact and handle basic information inquiries. An additional level of staff, known as Learning Advisers, exists to handle the inquiries of those who need more than basic information. A third tier of staff, known as Lifelong Learning Advisers, handles more complex inquiries and requests for help. As a rough indication, calls handled by Information Advisers last an average of 3.5 minutes, calls handled by Learning Advisers an average of 8.5 minutes, and calls handled by Lifelong Learning Advisers an average of 16 minutes. Demand for the services of Lifelong Learning Advisers appears to be substantially above their capacity to handle them. Special training programmes and qualifications have been devised or adapted for learndirect staff, as it has been found that standard qualifications do not easily fit its needs³¹. All staff have access to an online database of information on some 600,000 education and training courses, at all levels, as well as a wide variety of other printed information. The online database can be accessed directly at <http://www.learndirect.co.uk/>, and is updated monthly. An online diagnostic package can be used to assess interests and preferences as part of the web site. There have been over 10 million hits on the site since it opened in 2000.

28. See Hopkins, L. (2002) op. cit..

29. learndirect is a brand name that is normally written without an initial capital letter. In addition, within the United Kingdom within government documents it is normally printed in bold formatting as a further means of emphasising its unique identity.

30. A government flexible learning initiative that encompasses both online learning and advice services.

31. During the national visit it was indicated that some sectors of the career guidance field had expressed reservations about whether the type of work being conducted within learndirect could be described as career guidance or career advice. However initial suspicions were said to have considerably reduced.

42. In order to attract callers, learndirect conducts regular and systematic marketing campaigns. These make heavy use of radio and television, and can be targeted at particular occupations or themes. Ufi employs experienced marketing staff to buy advertising time and space for the purpose.

Trade union learning representatives

43. A particularly interesting recent initiative, jointly of the government and the Trades Union Congress (TUC)³², has been the creation of Union Learning Representatives. Shop floor union officials, the Union Learning Representatives are a means of targeting low-skilled and poorly qualified workers and providing them with information, advice and motivation to undertake education and training. The initiative is based upon the assumption that such workers are more likely to find it easy to relate to union officials in the workplace than they are to qualified career guidance experts located in agencies outside the workplace. It is also a way to better target groups such as older men, ethnic minorities and part time workers who typically receive less training than others.

44. In late 2002 there were around 3,500 Union Learning Representatives in the United Kingdom, and their number is projected to increase to perhaps seven times this by 2010³³. The Employment Act 2002 has given Union Learning Representatives a statutory right to carry out their duties, and to be adequately trained for their duties.

2.2.6 *Career guidance in higher education*

45. Career guidance services in higher education in the United Kingdom are diverse and varied. In part diversity and variety arise from the absence of any statutory obligation for universities to provide career guidance services, and in part from the traditional autonomy and independence of universities. Most universities have well established independent services, some provide career guidance through academic departments, and some through integrated student services. Services that are provided can range from information provision (both print and on line), personal advice and guidance, access to self-help techniques, careers fairs, employer interviews, vacation and at-graduation job placement, interview skills coaching and career management skills training more broadly, and curriculum-based career education. The services are relatively well developed and long-established compared to tertiary education careers services in some other OECD countries³⁴.

46. The qualifications of staff are more varied than is the case in other sectors of career guidance: partly to address this, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS -- see below) has supported the development of certificate and diploma courses in higher education career guidance. The 2001 Harris Review³⁵ of career guidance services in higher education recommended that universities should place increased emphasis upon their careers service staff being appropriately trained and qualified. AGCAS initially developed its own standards for the provision of career guidance in higher education, and universities have been able to seek accreditation against them on a voluntary basis. However AGCAS has now adopted the matrix standards (see footnote 27), and services are expected to be accredited against these by the end of 2005. In addition, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency has developed a

32. TUC support for and involvement in the initiative can be seen at <http://www.learningservices.org.uk/>.

33. Cabinet Office (2002) *In Demand: Adult Skills in the 21st Century*, Strategy Unit.

34. See Watts, A.G. and Van Esbroeck, R. (1998) *New Skills For New Futures. Higher Education Guidance and Counselling Services in the European Union*, VUB Press, Brussels.

35. Harris, M. (2001) *Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services*, Department for Education and Employment.

code of practice, again voluntary, for career guidance in higher education. Research published at about the same time as the Harris Review was released characterised United Kingdom higher education careers services as having much to offer those who know how to help themselves³⁶.

Box 1: Careers Wales

In April 2001 the National Assembly for Wales launched Careers Wales, a national all-age career guidance service that operates through a confederation of seven regional careers companies with a common brand name. Careers Wales' vision statement sees career guidance as being at the heart of social and economic prosperity, and its mission statement reflects a belief in the development of people through lifelong career planning. Careers Wales is responsible for delivering the statutory careers service, adult guidance, the learndirect call centre network, The Youth Gateway (a short, intensive transition skills course for 16-17 year-olds at risk in the transition from school), and education-business links. The concept of an all-age, specialised careers service had been debated in Wales well before the decision in England to establish Connexions.

Career education and guidance is seen as a universal entitlement for all young people in Wales. Within the framework of a universal entitlement, some staff specialise in working with those young people who have special needs. As in England, career education is a statutory requirement. Careers Wales supports school and college career education programmes (which are mandatory in Wales for those aged 13-19, and as in England vary widely in scale and quality) through curriculum consultancy, teacher training, and support for careers libraries. Some staff specialise in supporting schools and colleges in this way, and some in providing direct career guidance. An awards process, benchmarked against quality standards, is being used to improve the quality of school and college careers programmes. Through its responsibility for education-business links Careers Wales manages work experience, enterprise education, and mentoring programmes. Each involves both employer support, including quality assurance checks, and teacher development.

All careers companies operate one-stop-shops, and these are accessible on a drop-in basis to all ages. Some adult services are delivered, using an outreach model, in a wide variety of community settings, some through the offices of the individual careers companies, some using a mobile facility, some by telephone, and some online. Careers Wales operates an on-site service within enterprises to assist those facing redundancy. For unemployed 16-17 year-olds Careers Wales provides an employment, education and training referral and placement service.

Staff employed by Careers Wales can work with both youth and adults, but tend to specialise in one or the other. However the fact of a common employing authority for all staff gives service managers flexibility to deploy staff across different areas of specialisation. It is common, for example, for adult guidance staff to spend time in the Welsh learndirect call centres. A single employing authority within an all-age service also gives staff the possibility of a more varied work role.

2.2.7 The institutional framework of career guidance in the United Kingdom

47. One of the distinctive features of career guidance in the United Kingdom is the extensive and highly developed institutional framework that supports it. Few other OECD countries have such well developed structures. Some of the more important of these are outlined below. They include bodies for policy co-ordination, for standard setting and quality assurance, and for advocacy and representation.

National Information Advice and Guidance Board

48. The National Information Advice and Guidance Board was set up to ensure coherence in the planning of the career guidance services for adults and young people provided or secured by the

36. Rowley, G. and Purcell, K. (2001) "Up to the job? Graduates' perceptions of the United Kingdom higher education careers service", *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 416-435.

Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions. It is an important mechanism to ensure co-ordination of policy and provision both within and between the education and employment portfolios. No other OECD country at present has such a structure. Whilst it is not able to encompass all of the career guidance services provided in the United Kingdom (for example those in the private and not-for-profit sectors), it is able to encompass the largest and the most important of them. It is staffed by a secretariat located in the Department for Education and Skills.

The Guidance Council

49. The Guidance Council was established in 1993 as a registered charity, to represent the key organisations interested in the development of career guidance (including stakeholder organisations as well as associations of guidance practitioners), and has its own secretariat. Its main activities include: policy development and advocacy on behalf of the career guidance field; the promotion of quality; and commissioning research that will have strategic and policy relevance.

The Guidance Accreditation Board

50. The Guidance Accreditation Board was established in 1999, independent of the Guidance Council, to provide accreditation to a national quality-assurance framework for organisations giving people information, advice and guidance on learning and work. Accreditation is achieved through on-site assessment, and through continuous quality improvement. The quality standards used by the Board are more than voluntary, as organisations that receive government funds to provide adult IAG partnerships are required to meet them. The matrix standards against which accreditation is based can be found at <http://www.matrix-quality-standard.com/> (see also Employment National Training Organisation below).

The Institute of Career Guidance (ICG)

51. The Institute of Career Guidance represents career guidance practitioners, and has a lobbying, advocacy and policy role. In addition it is the awarding body for the Qualification in Careers Guidance which has replaced the Diploma in Careers Guidance. The Institute registers all students on the Qualification in Careers Guidance course, and awards their certificates. The Institute accredits institutions to provide the Qualification³⁷, and as such has a quality assurance role within the overall United Kingdom career guidance system.

The Employment National Training Organisation (EmpNTO)

52. EmpNTO is the national organisation responsible for setting training standards in a range of helping occupations including guidance, counselling, psychotherapy and mediation. The standards that it developed are the basis of the NVQ3 and NVQ4 national qualifications in career guidance. It is also responsible for administering the matrix quality standard for career guidance services. These can be found at <http://www.matrix-quality-standard.com/>.

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)

53. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) represents career services in higher education. Like other representative organisations in the field it has developed a code of practice for its members. These codes of practice are one of the important quality assurance mechanisms that operate in the career guidance field in the United Kingdom.

The Federation of Professional Associations for Guidance

54. FEDPAG is a recently formed umbrella body that represents career guidance practitioners working in all sectors. These include, in addition to ICG and AGCAS, bodies like the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers, which represents careers co-ordinators in schools, and the National

37. In 2002 the 14 institutions accredited to award the qualification were all universities.

Association for Educational Guidance for Adults. FEDPAG's constituent organisations have around 10,000 members nationally.

3. Policy issues

3.1 *Improving the quality of career services in schools*

55. Concerned to improve the quality of career education and guidance in schools, the government undertook an extensive consultation on the future shape and direction of career education and guidance in schools during 2002. Its response was issued in early 2003³⁸. Whilst career education has been a statutory part of the curriculum in Years 9-11 since 1998 (as a result of the Education Act 1997), this document announces that the government intends for the first time to extend the statutory requirement down to the age of 11, and at the same time encourages career education and guidance to be extended to the post-16 age group. It contains suggested learning outcomes together with content and activities that schools, colleges, and other settings where young people are learning, can use to develop their programmes.

56. Like previous guidelines, it leaves considerable discretion to schools and colleges to decide how to implement career education and guidance: for example in relation to how it should be incorporated into the curriculum and how much time should be allocated to it. It could be argued that the advantage of a non-statutory approach is that it allows schools and other organisations the freedom to use their judgement and make their own decisions. This could well be so, but it also carries with it, as with previous non-statutory approaches, an inevitably wide variation between schools in how career education and guidance is provided. Some will do it well and take it seriously. Others will not do it well and see other things as more important. This will mean that many young people with similar needs will continue to receive different provision.

57. In other areas of the curriculum, a mandated curriculum and standardised external assessments are ways of helping to ensure consistency. However the latter might not be appropriate in the area of career education and guidance. For these reasons the inclusion within the new framework of suggestions on quality assurance are important. These suggestions relate to Ofsted inspections, use of local standards and quality awards including using national criteria for these standards and awards, and self-assessment.

58. In many respects the new national framework for career education and guidance in schools is an advance, and it is also true that some research does suggest some improvement to the ways that schools approach career education in recent years³⁹. However like past arrangements, the new framework leaves many questions about quality and consistency unresolved. For the moment the government has chosen to focus upon an approach that involves mechanisms such as promoting standards for delivery, promoting best practice, and inspections of careers provision.

59. Whether these will be sufficient will be an important future issue. In introducing Connexions, the government included a legislative requirement that there be no reduction in the quality and quantity of existing career education and guidance for young people. At the time of the national visit it did not appear that this had assuaged all of the concerns raised in research conducted during the period that the introduction of Connexions was being foreshadowed⁴⁰. Many who were interviewed were still concerned

38. Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Careers Education and Guidance in England: A National Framework 11-19*.

39. See for example Barnes et al. (2003) op. cit..

40. Morris et al. (2001) op. cit..

that the introduction of Connexions would reduce and/or refocus career education and guidance in schools. These concerns suggest that it will be very important for the government to monitor career education and guidance in schools rigorously and systematically, and to communicate the results of this research to career guidance practitioners and leaders. The importance of a national research strategy for career guidance in the United Kingdom is raised in Section 3.4 below, and this is one issue that could well be part of it.

60. The importance of career guidance to government policy objectives in the United Kingdom could well, in future, require more detailed consideration of other options for ensuring the quality and consistency of career education and guidance in schools. These could include a mandated careers curriculum; mandated qualifications for school staff who provide and in particular co-ordinate career education and guidance; and a more precise specification of pupil entitlements. A key issue in considering these approaches would be balancing entitlements with flexibility, and expressing entitlements to career education and guidance in such a way that they do not rigidly confine schools to particular ways of providing services.

61. An important issue in ensuring the quality of career education and guidance services in schools will be the skills, qualifications and competences of the Connexions staff who work with them. However the way in which training and qualification arrangements in Connexions will support the government's promise to maintain the level and quality of career education and guidance for young people was far from clear at the time of the national visit. It was uncertain, and appeared to vary between services, whether staff would have a specialised career guidance role or a more differentiated role, able to provide a range of support services in addition to career guidance. And it was not clear, within these options, what training and qualifications models would be the most suitable and what their cost implications would be.

62. The policy of the Connexions Service National Unit has been for all Personal Advisers to be termed such, regardless of whether they have an additional careers qualification or not. This would seem to risk confusion in the eyes of the public about sources of career guidance. If all were termed simply Personal Advisers, for example, it would seem harder for young people to be able to discriminate between those qualified to offer career guidance and those not.

63. Lack of clarity, if not confusion, also seems to exist within Connexions services about the nomenclature of career guidance practitioners. An August 2002 issue of the Institute of Career Guidance job vacancy bulletin saw Connexions services variously advertising for: Universal Personal Advisers; Personal Advisers – College Based; Personal Advisers; Inclusion Advisers; Personal Advisers – Adult Guidance Team; Personal Advisers (Education); Personal Advisers (Careers); and Careers Advisers (Working as Connexions Personal Advisers). Whilst there is now more common use of the term Personal Adviser as the main job title, wide variation continues in the descriptors included in parentheses after this. This wide variety of titles within what is intended as a national service seems to imply that on the ground there is either confusion about the roles involved or understandable resistance to the notion of a single and undifferentiated job title⁴¹.

64. It will be essential, if the quality and level of career education and guidance in schools is to be maintained, to ensure that the specialised career education and guidance knowledge, qualifications and skills base of the Connexions services is also maintained. Clearly the Diploma for Personal Advisers (see Section 3.2) will not, by itself, ensure that this occurs, as it does not attempt to develop the specialised knowledge and skills required for the delivery of career education and guidance. In order to maintain standards of career guidance skills and qualifications, Connexions services will, then, be faced with the need to have at least some of their staff double-qualified: both in career guidance and to act as Personal

41. In other organisations that provide career guidance such as Further Education colleges and IAG partnerships the term Careers Adviser continues to be widely used.

Advisers more broadly. This will have significant cost implications⁴². The issue of modular training and qualification structures for career guidance practitioners, to reflect the diverse settings in which they work as well as the common core of skills that they need, is raised in Section 3.2 below.

3.2 *Improving the qualifications and training needed for lifelong guidance*

65. The United Kingdom has a very diverse and highly developed structure of qualifications and training arrangements for career guidance practitioners. This is particularly evident in comparison to the range and depth of qualifications in career guidance available in some other OECD countries.

66. For thirty years the principal recognised qualification for career guidance practitioners was the Diploma in Careers Guidance, which was delivered through tertiary education institution. It is now being phased out, and its last intake took place in 2001. The principal qualifications now are:

- The Qualification in Career Guidance, which is a one-year full-time or two year part-time postgraduate course taken at a university, and which is “owned” or awarded by the Institute of Careers Guidance;
- An NVQ4 (or National Vocational Qualification Level 4⁴³) in Advice and Guidance that can be obtained through the work-based route that is common in the United Kingdom qualifications system⁴⁴, and which would normally take 12-18 months to complete; and
- An NVQ3 in advice and guidance, which is normally taken by those who work as employment and training advisers but whose work role does not include giving full career guidance.

67. Those who provide career guidance within the Connexions service are required to complete a Diploma for Personal Advisers⁴⁵ in addition to the specific qualification in career guidance that they hold. This Diploma focuses upon some of the general competences required in working with young people, such as referral, communication, and working with agencies and the community. Normally those Connexions staff who provide career guidance are required to have the NVQ4 in advice and guidance. If they have, instead, the Qualification in Career Guidance at the time of recruitment, they are required to also take the NVQ4 (or specified units of it). In other employment settings either of the two main qualifications can be acceptable.

68. Career guidance practitioners in other settings at times hold these qualifications, but also a wide variety of others. For example NFER research on career education and guidance in schools referred to previously has shown that school careers co-ordinators can hold a range of qualifications at Certificate or Masters level. Similarly in tertiary education the principal career guidance qualifications held by

42. An associated issue with major cost implications is whether all Personal Advisers should be competent to provide career guidance, or whether services will have staff with separate qualifications and training for career guidance and for other services provided through Connexions such as assistance with drug problems, housing problems or teenage pregnancy.

43. Referred to in Scotland as an SVQ or Scottish Vocational Qualification.

44. Although in many cases with a tertiary education institution acting as the assessing organisation.

45. Or a short Understanding Connexions course.

practitioners cover a wide range, some specific to the delivery of career guidance in higher education⁴⁶ but others not. Within the employment service/Jobcentre Plus staff attend internal training courses that include advice and guidance components, and a significant number have an NVQ3 or NVQ4 in guidance. Staff in learndirect are required to work towards an NVQ2 or NVQ3 (depending upon the nature of their work) that has been adapted specifically to meet learndirect's needs.

69. An important feature of the qualifications structure of career guidance in the United Kingdom, which is not found in some other OECD countries, is that many higher education institutions offer graduate degrees in career guidance, both at diploma and at masters level.

70. The range and depth of these qualifications is both a strength and a weakness of United Kingdom arrangements. It is a strength in large part because the level of skill and knowledge that is developed, and the requirements that are imposed in many settings for career guidance staff to have formal qualifications, are well in advance of some other OECD countries. It is also a strength in that training arrangements and qualifications are available for staff working at several levels: for example those who are primarily information officers, those who provide personal advice, and those in management and co-ordination roles. However it is also a weakness, in that the qualification structure is fragmented⁴⁷. Specialised qualifications for different employing sectors, and the "ownership" of qualifications by different bodies that represent practitioners, both reduce the flexibility of employers when recruiting new career guidance practitioners (thus raising their costs) and limit career opportunities for career guidance practitioners.

71. An additional problem with the qualification structure is that many of the recent innovations in career guidance in the United Kingdom that have been introduced in response to new government priorities and a growing emphasis upon lifelong learning do not find themselves well reflected in the principal qualifications that career guidance practitioners obtain. The content of these seems to have been developed largely around a model that assumes career guidance to be provided primarily to young people and primarily through personal interviews. Less well reflected in the major qualifications are developments such as:

- The growth of adult and community-based guidance provision;
- The development of telephone- and e-mail-based services;
- The need to integrate curriculum and experiential methods with personal advice and guidance, particularly for young people but also within higher education;
- The development of ICT-based and self service methods;
- The systematic involvement of a range of non-specialists such as employers, parents, alumni and other community members in service delivery; and
- The competences required to achieve outcomes in career guidance services through co-ordinating the efforts of others, rather than through direct service provision.

46. For example an MA or Postgraduate Diploma in Careers Guidance in Higher Education, or a Certificate and a Post-experience Diploma in Careers Education, Information and Guidance in Higher Education for new entrants and for those without appropriate qualifications already.

47. For example in a May 2002 discussion paper, the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers pointed to the wide range of certificate, masters and diploma courses in career education and guidance in England, and indicated that each is planned in isolation without following a common framework. It advocated a common and national specification for qualifications in career education and guidance.

72. On both grounds, what seems needed is the development of a new qualification structure, particularly at the NVQ4/postgraduate diploma level where occupational fields are most strongly entrenched, and that provides a more broad-based and coherent training for the full range of career guidance practitioners. Such a qualification structure would include a common core of skills, together with specialised modules in a range of areas such as school- and college-based delivery (curriculum-based); career guidance for adults; working with the disadvantaged and those at-risk; telephone- and ICT-based delivery; community-based models; employment-based career guidance services, both public and private; career guidance in tertiary education; and working with and co-ordinating non-specialists and community organisations.

73. Such a structure should be available in both an institution-based and a work-based model, but ideally through a combined model in which theory and practice, classroom and workplace learning are combined. A modular structure would allow it to be used for both initial training and recurrent education and training. Such a model would allow for greater mobility on the part of guidance practitioners, apart from its advantages in better tailoring training to a broader range of employer skill requirements. The development of such a structure would appear to be an important role for the National Information Advice and Guidance Board working with EmpNTO and FEDPAG. A study of the labour market for careers practitioners (supply, demand, mobility) would be very helpful as a complement to the development of such a structure, and could form one of the priorities of the National Research Forum discussed in Section 3.4.

3.3 *Services for adults*

74. Recent innovations in the provision of career guidance for adults in the United Kingdom represent an impressive reconceptualisation of traditional models of career guidance. This is both in comparison to ways of providing career guidance in the past in the United Kingdom, and in comparison to many of the ways that career guidance is provided to adults in other OECD countries. Particularly impressive examples include learndirect with its use of modern marketing and the mass media in combination with call-centre and internet technologies; the use of laptop computers observed during the national visit within the Kent adult IAG partnership both to allow peripatetic services in community settings to give clients full access to on-line information and guidance tools, and the use of database technologies to match demographic data on clients to target group priorities and provide measures of service impact⁴⁸; the peripatetic, community-based model of guidance delivery observed in Careers Wales (Cardiff and Vale); and the trade union learning representatives initiative.

75. Many OECD countries have much to learn from these innovations. They represent important steps towards the realisation of a lifelong guidance system, accessible to all throughout life, as a component of a lifelong learning system. One important aspect of the approach to career guidance for adults that has developed in the United Kingdom is its diversity. It is available through a wide range of organisations, in a wide range of settings, delivered in a wide range of ways, and subject to substantial local influence. This allows it to meet individual and local needs better than might occur with a more monolithic approach.

76. A stumbling block to the development of a coherent and comprehensive approach to adult guidance policy is the distinction that is made⁴⁹, in policy and terminology, between “advice” on the one

48. Research that reports the use of databases and geographical information systems to map the impact of career guidance can be found in The Guidance Council (2002) *Breaking New Ground: Mapping the Territory and Benefits of Career Guidance*.

49. Largely in England. It tends not to be seen as an issue in Wales.

hand and “guidance” on the other, with “guidance” being seen as more “in-depth” and therefore as more time consuming and costly, than “advice”. The conventional wisdom is that government is certainly willing to fund the provision of career information for all, and is increasingly assuming responsibility for providing adults with career “advice”, but that career “guidance” should be funded by individuals themselves, except for groups where a special case for public funding can be developed. Thus the distinction was seen as a way of defining the boundary between individual and government responsibility, and as a way to ration resources.

77. However the distinction between “advice” and “guidance” is not a good basis for allocating resources to career guidance services for adults. This is for a number of reasons:

- First, those who provide services rarely know what the distinction means in practical terms. If they do understand it they rarely believe that it is a useful distinction in terms of real client needs, and it appears to have little impact on their actual behaviour. During the national visit, for example, all practitioners and all service managers who were asked indicated that they would not stop providing services to a client at the point where they felt that a hypothetical boundary between “advice” and “guidance” had been crossed. Certainly clients do not seem to understand the difference, and so it can be of little value in helping them to choose between services or decide what is appropriate to their needs.
- Second, services resort to a range of techniques of obfuscation and deception to prevent those who provide the funds from knowing what they are really doing when reporting on outcomes and performance. As a result government is not provided with transparent reporting and monitoring information that lets it know what its resources are actually being used for.
- Third, not all services that provide career guidance to adults adhere to the distinction. For example learndirect uses public funds to provide both brief and more extensive assistance, although it does not widely advertise that it provides more extensive assistance and provides it only on a limited scale.
- Fourth, the distinction takes little account of the possibility that many information and advice sessions can be quite lengthy, and therefore resource-intensive. Work that has been commissioned by the OECD career guidance policy review makes it clear that if career information is to be provided appropriately and adequately understood and used, it will often need to be mediated by personal intervention, and related to people’s personal circumstances and goals⁵⁰.
- Fifth, there is an apparent conflict between the requirement to concentrate upon brief interventions to reduce resource demands and the requirement in the adult IAG partnerships to focus upon precisely those groups most likely to be in need of more intensive assistance. And in reality the performance targets and delivery methods of the IAG partnerships seem to be ensuring that resources are provided to the most disadvantaged and to key policy groups.
- Sixth, focusing attention upon “advice” or “guidance” as the basis for delivery leads to too sharp a distinction between delivery methods, and does not sufficiently allow for a wider

50. See Grubb, N. (2002) “Who I Am: The Inadequacy of Career Information in the Information Age”, paper prepared for the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review, Paris, and Tricot, A. (2002) “Amélioration de l’Information sur les Métiers”, paper prepared for the European Commission and the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review, Paris, www.oecd.org/edu/careerguidance.

range of delivery methods to be factored in to the equation (for example group techniques; telephone or ICT-based methods; or self-help methods).

78. For the distinction between “advice” on the one hand and “guidance” on the other to be practicable, a widely accessible private market for career guidance would need to exist. However very little information is available on the extent and nature of privately provided career guidance in the United Kingdom. Some IAG partnerships do offer career guidance on a fee-paying basis, but this is not universal, and does not appear to be a deliberate goal of government policy at this stage. Government has, however, asked IAG partnerships to map the extent of career guidance services in their regions, including fee-charging ones, in order to facilitate the referral of clients to them if necessary.

79. Where attempts have been made to establish private markets for career guidance in the United Kingdom, these do not appear to have been successful. An example is the unwillingness of large numbers to purchase the self-assessment tool that learndirect has developed, even at a very low cost, and the existence of free providers of the similar on-line assessment tools. The problems in establishing private markets for career guidance have been raised in other work commissioned by the OECD career guidance policy review. It points out that markets can be identified for educational guides and other forms of career information, and that a limited market exists for outplacement services funded by enterprises. However individuals in almost all countries appear reluctant to pay for career guidance at marketable rates.

80. There are several reasons for career guidance being hard to handle through private markets: both demand and supply are hard to specify and define (even those who provide it are often not able to agree on how to describe the services they provide, as the United Kingdom example illustrates); it is highly variable in nature; it is often subsumed within other services such as education and job placement; and its effects are very hard to predict or to measure⁵¹.

81. It is, of course, perfectly reasonable for governments to wish to minimise the drain on resources represented by those who can afford to pay being given intensive services for nothing. Other methods are available, but they also are not without flaws. One is individual need, measured by income. This, however, is difficult, and can be undignified, to monitor unless only low income groups on benefits are targeted. It also runs the risk of career guidance being seen as a service for the poor, not as a broader tool of lifelong learning policies. Another, which can be seen in the operation of the IAG partnerships, is the setting of performance targets. The general remit of learndirect to focus upon assistance to the low-qualified also seems to be reflected in the monitoring data that it has gathered on the overall characteristics of the clients calling its help line. In such cases the effective use of resources to target those in most need is apparent.

82. The present arrangement is an uneasy compromise between a fully government-funded system on the one hand and a more fully market-based system that contains special provision for the disadvantaged on the other. It has been designed largely to limit demand as a way to constrain expenditure. However this limitation on demand does not seem compatible with national commitments to lifelong learning goals, of which lifelong guidance needs to be an element. Limiting demand for learning, for example, does not form part of the United Kingdom public policy framework. Where financial constraints do seem to limit demand for learning, public policy has approached the problem through innovative approaches to financing that seek larger individual and enterprise contributions⁵². In order to meet adult demand for career guidance throughout the lifespan, governments need either to accept that career

51. Grubb, N. (2002) “An Occupation in Harmony: The Roles of Markets and Governments in Career Information and Career Guidance”, paper prepared for the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review, Paris, www.oecd.org/edu/careerguidance.

52. See OECD (2003) Mechanisms for the Co-finance of Lifelong Learning. Reports Prepared by National Authorities and Members of the European Learning Account Network, Paris EDU/EC/RD(2003)2.

guidance is a matter for the public purse to fund, or to take the creation of a private market and private financing mechanisms more seriously. A first step in doing so would be to more fully understand the extent and nature of the private market for career guidance, which was not clear from the evidence collected in order to complete the national questionnaire.

83. These are issues that could be examined within wider discussions in the United Kingdom about mechanisms for co-financing lifelong learning, such as the individual learning account model that is now to be revived following initial administrative problems⁵³.

84. They are also issues that could be tackled by addressing some of the barriers that underpin the difficulty of creating markets for career guidance. One of the key issues here is the importance of career guidance having a clear and readily identifiable “product name” in the eyes of the public. The diversity of titles and qualifications of those who work in career guidance in the United Kingdom is an impediment to the development of such a clear product name. Reducing this diversity in the interests of a clearer public perception of what is provided and by who would be an important step in laying the basis for a genuine market in career guidance. Government and career guidance representative organisations need to work together on this. Relevant here is the removal of the term “careers” both from the title of Connexions, the government’s new comprehensive support service for young people, and, at least in principle, from the title of those who work within it.

85. Another central issue is the difficulty of specifying both demand and supply. A substantial piece of research that has attempted to specify the nature of community demand for career guidance in the United Kingdom was commissioned by the Guidance Council⁵⁴ with financial support from government. This needs to be repeated on a regular (for example three-year) basis so that time series data can be built up to monitor trends. Research is also needed to better understand the supply of career guidance in the United Kingdom. This would be handled best through seeking information from clients (and potential clients) rather than through providers, in order to capture the full range of sources of information and advice that are used. A module on career guidance in the United Kingdom labour force survey would be one option: seeking information on the full range of career guidance services used, on responses to these services, and on expenditure on them, and relating this to individual characteristics such as age, occupation, gender and educational status.

86. Gaining a clearer understanding of community demand for career guidance and of the real supply of career guidance could well be issues for the National Research Forum (see section 3.4) to address.

3.4 *Raising the knowledge base for career guidance*

87. Compared to many other countries the UK has a strong knowledge base for its career guidance services. It has, for example, specialised centres for research and policy analysis in career guidance such as the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) and the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby. In addition to these centres, several other centres both within tertiary education and outside of it contain research staff with a particular interest and expertise in career guidance. One of the important underpinnings of the knowledge base for career guidance in the United Kingdom is the result of the high level of qualifications required of career guidance practitioners, and the strong role of the

53. Another model is provided by Austria, where career guidance services provided by employer organisations and trade unions are made possible by the compulsory membership fees that firms and employees pay to support the overall work of these organisations.

54. Market and Opinion Research International (2001) *Demand for Information, Advice and Guidance*, Winchester, The Guidance Council, Winchester.

university sector in providing these qualifications, including to post graduate level. This has meant that there exists a group of academic staff in United Kingdom universities with in-depth knowledge and expertise in the field of career guidance. As a result, the United Kingdom has a sizeable group of researchers who are experienced in the field. Their work is widely used in other OECD countries.

88. The United Kingdom research in the area of career guidance is also distinguished by its frequent focus upon policy and evaluation, not simply upon the processes, methods and techniques of career guidance. Furthermore, government commissions research extensively, makes use of it in policy development, and is willing to publish its outcomes, even when its conclusions might be critical of current initiatives. This body of research is, in turn, used extensively by those who work in the field of career guidance, ensuring vigorous, healthy and informed debate between policy makers and practitioners. Few other OECD countries are in such a position.

89. However much of the research that is conducted has been one-off and fragmented rather than strategic, and not disseminated widely or effectively. The United Kingdom is well placed to take its research and evaluation to the next stage, and to develop a strategic national research and evaluation agenda for career information, advice and guidance. Steps have recently been taken to achieve this. Following a conference jointly organised by the Guidance Council and the Centre for Guidance Studies in May 2002⁵⁵, a proposal for the establishment of a National Research Forum for career guidance in the United Kingdom has been supported by the government. Initially there is to be a period of consultation and design, to be followed by a two-year period of pilot activity. At present, the key objectives of the Forum are to:

- Develop a coherent research strategy relevant to policy and practice;
- Facilitate the identification of research priorities, and identify gaps in the research base;
- Provide a strategically co-ordinated approach to research to support investment in career guidance; and
- Involve a wide range of stakeholders in developing a national research agenda for career guidance and in using research to improve policy and practice.

90. This is a very positive step in the right direction, and will place the United Kingdom ahead of other OECD countries in its capacity to marshal research evidence in support of policy development and implementation in career guidance. A number of suggestions have been made above on what some of the initial research priorities might be for the forum. Suggestions follow for ways in which such a body might operate. The forum should:

- Be composed of government; career guidance practitioners or their representatives; and those with research expertise, although the latter not necessarily in career guidance;
- Have a charter to set national research priorities in order to strengthen the link between policy and practice;
- Provide medium-term (three year) core funding to a limited number of centres of specialisation, one of which should have a clearinghouse role for research and evaluation in policy related areas;

55. The Guidance Council (2002) *Creating a Vision for Career Guidance Beyond 2006. Identifying the Research Opportunities*.

- Provide funds for research for individual projects, in line with its national priorities, on both a commissioned and a call-for-tender basis;
- Fund predominantly policy-related research, but also some researcher initiated “blue sky” research; and
- Adopt a shared funding model, with a requirement for its grants to be complemented by funds from other sources.

4. Conclusion

91. Career guidance has a number of very real strengths in the United Kingdom, particularly when compared to many other OECD countries. These strengths include:

- The level of provision is high compared to many other countries, and it is well diversified across sectors;
- It is provided in a diverse range of ways, and impressive efforts have been made in recent years to make it more widely accessible: over the life span; in time; and in location;
- It is well embedded in both public policy and in national politics, and processes that involve relevant stakeholders exist to stimulate review and planning;
- There is a large, well trained and committed body of practitioners;
- Quality is taken very seriously;
- There is a well-organised set of training arrangements and of qualifications. These are available at several levels to reflect a diverse range of skills, and are available in several modes: face-to-face instruction; distance education; and through workplace assessment;
- There is a readiness to use research and evaluation in policy making, and a well-developed infrastructure for this; and
- The level of innovation is high.

92. These strengths suggest that the United Kingdom is well placed in the development of a lifelong guidance system as a key component of its lifelong learning policies and its active approaches to labour market policy and welfare policy. However while impressive steps have been taken in recent years to improve ease of access to career guidance, more needs to be done to improve its transparency. As indicated in this Country Note, this is related to the variety of titles and qualifications of those who work in career guidance. A broader, more integrated and more flexible qualifications structure is needed, both in the interests of increasing the transparency of career guidance, and in order better to reflect many of the policy steps that have been taken to widen access and increase the flexibility of delivery. There is a need to ensure that, particularly for young people who are at the threshold of lifelong learning, career guidance retains a strong and independent identity.

93. The growing divergence between the delivery models that have been adopted within the different constituent countries of the United Kingdom should, from a policy perspective, be seen in a positive light. It offers opportunities to assess and test the relative virtues, in the implementation of lifelong guidance, of

all-age compared to age-specific services, and of comprehensive compared to career-specific approaches to assisting individuals. Such questions should be high on the list of the priorities of the new National Research Forum. Other OECD countries have much to learn from the answers.

Appendix 1: Programme for the national visit

Monday 8th April

Morning: NICEC facilitated seminar to provide background on the structure of guidance provision in the UK, Peterborough.

Afternoon Leicestershire Careers Service
Leicester University Careers Advisory Service.

Tuesday 9th April

Morning: Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions Service

Afternoon Leicester College of Further Education

Wednesday 10th April

Morning The Ockendon School, South Ockendon, Essex

University of East London – Postgraduate Diploma in Careers Guidance

Afternoon Adult Information, Advice and Guidance Partnership, Kent

Thursday 11th April

One day conference for 25-30 invited delegates. A roundtable discussion facilitated by NICEC Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge

Friday 12th April

Morning Trade Union Learning Representative, Manchester City Council

Openshaw Jobcentre Plus

Afternoon learndirect helpline in Manchester

Monday 15th April

Meeting with policy makers, Welsh Assembly

Visit to Careers Wales (Cardiff and Vale)

Tuesday 16th April

Morning: University for Industry, Sheffield

Demonstration of Worktrain web-based package, Department for Work and Pensions

Afternoon Discussions with policy makers, Department for Education and Skills, Sheffield (including career information, Connexions and higher education)

Wednesday 17th April

Morning Discussion with Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby

Visit to Bents Green School, Sheffield

Afternoon Debrief, Department for Education and Skills