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Pocket Watch – Ofsted casts its verdict on careers guidance in schools

Introduction

Ever since the Government dismantled the existing careers guidance system and handed responsibility over to schools, reports and analyses have poured in criticising the decision. This month the statutory requirement "to secure access to independent careers guidance for pupils in Years 9 to 11" which commenced in Sept 2012 was further extended to take in Year 8 and 16-18 year olds as well but still the reports have come in: the Education Committee in January, CIPD and BIC in April, the National Careers Council in June and Barnardos in August, all outlining concerns in some form. Now Ofsted has published its own **thoughts**. Having visited 60 schools between Dec 2012 and March 2013 to find out how the first year of the new system was working, its verdict adds to the woes: "the new statutory duty is not working well enough"

Where are things going wrong?

Most of the concerns expressed to date have been about the impact of devolving responsibility to schools, a decision labelled by the Education Committee as "regrettable." Particular worries have been that the all-important personal contact could be lost, how far the National Careers Service, 'a well kept secret' according to the National Careers Council Report would pick up the pieces especially for younger learners, opportunities or lack of for employer engagement and essentially whether a de-commissioned service in this form could respond to the fast-moving needs of a youth labour market.

Many of these concerns are echoed in this Ofsted report which highlights four in particular. First that the guidance provided for schools has been, well, pretty poor. The DfE guidance issued in July 2012 had a list of helpful websites but essentially said over to you now. Second, an obvious corollary and one we have found in our own forthcoming research, namely that careers provision has ended up being pretty patchy if offered fully at all: "only one in five schools were effective in ensuring all students in Years 9, 10, 11 were receiving the level of information, advice and guidance they needed." Paragraphs 17-21 of the report are fairly explicit. Third, employer and external engagement is weak resulting in an unbalanced picture of possible opportunities: "many schools visited were generally poor at promoting vocational training and in particular apprenticeships." Fourth, the National Careers Service, in a word, neither well understood nor well used

What's being proposed to put things right?

The Government's **response**, issued as part of its Inspiration Vision for young people, lists a number of actions intended to deal with issues raised in both the Ofsted and the earlier National Careers Council report. In all, 20 recommendations are listed, some more hopeful than others. These include revising the statutory guidance for schools, although no end date set, extending the activities of the National Careers Service so that it reaches into the work of schools, this to be included as part of new contract negotiations in 2014, highlighting good practice models and encouraging the use of social media, encouraging employers perhaps through LEPs to come into schools and reviewing the Destination Measures. Ofsted has signalled that it will give careers guidance a high priority in inspections this year. We'll see if it can garner better news next year



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Carers Guidance Action Plan 2013