

Helping the inbetweeners:

Ensuring careers advice
improves the options
for all young people

Believe in
children



Barnardo's

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Section one: Introduction and executive summary.....

Making the transition from education into the workplace can be difficult for anyone, regardless of their background. But for the disadvantaged young people Barnardo's works with, a lack of dependable, authoritative support and advice to help them make choices about their future careers can make that transition seem almost impossible. The poor outcomes for those who fail to get a firm foot on a career ladder are all too well known.¹ Informative, impartial, and reliable careers guidance is vital to help ensure everyone receives a fair chance to fulfil their ambitions in the workplace.

During 2012 some significant changes were made to the way that careers guidance² is provided to young people in England. Most notably the responsibility for delivering careers guidance was passed from local authorities to schools, and the National Careers Service – a combination of predominantly web and helpline-based provision – was established to offer careers guidance to people of all ages, as well as Plotr, a government-supported website specifically targeted at young people. At the same time Connexions services – local authority-based provision which previously led the delivery of much careers guidance to young people – continue to decline as local authorities are forced to make tough choices to make savings in their budgets.

This report outlines these policy changes in more detail and then looks at the impact they are having on young people. It does not profess to be a definitive account of exactly where careers guidance services have fallen into decline or fully reflect the pressures on schools and local authorities to deliver these services effectively in an increasingly tough economic landscape. Instead it describes the views of young people that Barnardo's works with, as well as those of professionals working with them – young people who want to work, but many of whom seem more likely to end up trapped in low-paying jobs or even become

classified as 'not in education, training or employment' (NEET).

This research was driven by a desire to find out how the most vulnerable young people were being served by careers guidance. What we found, however, was that for the very vulnerable – those young people NEET or bottom of the attainment scale – much provision thankfully remains available in parts of the country. Instead it appears to be the cohort of young people just above them who are most at risk of receiving poor careers guidance which in turn prevents them achieving their ambitions; these are young people who may have been disengaged from school and be equally in need of independent guidance, but increasing pressure on local authority budgets means that this group no longer qualify for intensive support. Barnardo's believes that with focused guidance and full information,³ these same young people could progress to sustainable, enjoyable careers rather than the more usual path they presently take into a succession of short-term jobs, disillusionment, and probably forms of state subsidy through tax credits, benefits, or support services.

However, it is clear reaching these young people is not always easy. For many of them school is not an environment which they necessarily trust or enjoy – they have in the past benefitted from the flexibility of support offered by Connexions and other local youth-based services in the community. Yet as the duty to provide careers guidance passed from local authorities to schools in 2012, such non-school/community-based support is increasingly unavailable to most young people as services in many areas are increasingly focussed on school-based provision.

The decline in Connexions services is the starkest reminder of the backdrop to this report – that is one of budget cuts for public services, which is reducing the likelihood that quality careers guidance provision is

1 Coles, B et al (2010) *Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training*. University of York, www.york.ac.uk/media/spsw/documents/research-and-publications/NEET_Final_Report_July_2010_York.pdf, accessed 28 February 2013.

2 Barnardo's recognises that quality careers provision contains elements of 'education', 'information', 'advice', and 'guidance'. However, for the purposes of this report 'careers guidance' is used as a catch-all term to represent an amalgam of each of these separate elements.

3 Please see Section two: Research background for a description of Barnardo's belief of what quality careers information, advice and guidance consists of.



available to all that need it in many areas. The report highlights examples of good practice by local authorities and schools in using resources more effectively to protect services. Nevertheless the overall picture is still one of patchy services operating across different parts of the country and even from young person to young person.

Most pertinently we find that despite the Coalition Government emphasising the importance of young people receiving impartial, independent, and preferably face-to-face, guidance in schools, this is not happening everywhere. We recognise that schools face enormous challenges with no new resources to deliver on their new duties to provide independent careers guidance. However, a recurring theme arising from conversations with the young people we interviewed was inadequate information being provided by schools about vocational courses, apprenticeships, or options beyond the more traditional route of school sixth form and A-levels. Worryingly much of the careers guidance being provided in schools and elsewhere still seemed to lack true aspiration for the child and was often too gender-specific.

In part the Government intends to mitigate cuts to 'on-the-ground' services by the introduction of web and telephone-based careers guidance available to all. However, none of the young people we talked to had heard of the National Careers Service website or Plotr, which were introduced in

2012. Indeed our research questions the assumptions often made by policy makers that all young people are digitally literate – although all those we spoke to were using the internet regularly, in most cases this was only to access social media via smartphones. Almost none had considered searching the internet to find more advice on pursuing a career.

Indeed it seemed that many young people lacked the skills to use remote services without direct support from an adult. The new websites are not necessarily easy for a young person to navigate even if they are confident accessing information via the internet. A related barrier to young people accessing the telephone helpline was the cost of calling it from their mobile phone (up to 40p per minute) given many did not appear to have access to a landline where the same call would be free.

However, more fundamentally the messages we received were that for careers guidance to be taken seriously by young people it needs to come from a trusted and authoritative source that they know. Whilst web and phone-based services can be extremely helpful in providing specialist information, they can never truly replace the advice and guidance elements that are present in face-to-face interaction.

From the research we have developed a number of conclusions and recommendations based on the findings:

Conclusions:

- The changes in policy have resulted in a decline in provision for young people. The replacement of face-to-face services with remote online or telephone-based services is wholly inadequate.
- With quality careers guidance disadvantaged young people stand a better chance of fulfilling their ambitions in the labour market.
- The young people most likely to be missing out on careers guidance are not the NEET group, but those just above this group in terms of attainment.
- Face-to-face advice is vitally important for quality careers guidance to be provided effectively to young people.
- It is disadvantaged young people who are most reliant on state services to help them as they are least likely to be able to access reliable face-to-face guidance informally outside of school.
- Some young people are at risk of missing out on careers guidance if it is not available outside school and in more individualised formats.
- Careers guidance services are inevitably being hit by cuts. Where careers guidance works well, local authorities and schools are working together. There needs to be better synergy between their respective duties in relation to careers guidance.
- There is still too much gender-stereotyping in careers guidance. More needs to be done to encourage diversity of aspiration for all children regardless of gender.
- Independence of careers guidance in schools is not currently guaranteed. Schools need to be helped to increase the depth and diversity of their careers guidance provision.
- Young people are not as digitally competent as it is often perceived. Web and telephone support can only be part of the solution – they need to be made more accessible for young people and policy makers must recommend they are most effectively used in conjunction with adult support.



Recommendations:

- **Careers guidance must be more readily available beyond schools.**

The group of young people who would benefit most from quality careers guidance – neither those most obviously vulnerable to being NEET, nor those destined for Higher Education or advanced apprenticeships, but instead those somewhere in the middle of these extremes – are among those least likely to receive it, often because they are not always able or willing to access it in schools. Policy makers must explore how we can ensure a menu of careers guidance is readily available beyond the school gates to help intervene earlier with these ambitious, but disadvantaged, young people.

- **Face-to-face careers guidance must be guaranteed for all young people who ask for it.**

It is clear from our research that there is no effective substitute for quality face-to-face careers guidance. Although there is valuable information contained in the new websites set up by the Government, young people will only be able to use it effectively in conjunction with adult support. Otherwise they will look for face-to-face advice from any source if experts are not accessible to them in person. This results in limited understandings of the options available to them and increased propensity to fall through the net towards poor outcomes.

- **Schools need better guidance on how to offer quality careers guidance to their pupils, and provision in schools should be benchmarked to national standards which can be assessed within Ofsted inspections.**

Whilst there is no clarity or accountability around schools' duty to provide independent careers guidance, it is likely services in schools will remain patchy at best. Barnardo's

agrees with the findings of the Education Select Committee recently repeated in a Commons debate that *'the transfer of responsibility to schools was regrettable, as was the way it was done.'*⁴ Government needs to more clearly indicate how much resource schools are expected to devote to providing effective careers guidance, and national standards should be put in place so the quality of provision can be more clearly assessed within the Ofsted inspection regime.

- **The local authority role in respect of careers guidance should be clarified and best practice examples of schools and local authorities working together on this issue should be shared more widely.**

Research for this report uncovered some good examples of local authorities continuing to support local schools in providing careers guidance. This is a shared problem, but our report suggests this link is not always clear in all areas. The Government must further clarify how the overlapping responsibilities of schools and local authorities can best be drawn together. It is recommended that best practice case studies of the sort we have uncovered are disseminated to demonstrate how to create more effective services for young people despite the harsh economic climate.

- **Remote careers guidance needs to be better promoted and made more 'user-friendly' in order to reach the young people it is designed to help.**

Plotr still needs considerable development and a proper launch to raise awareness amongst the people expected to use it. The sections for young people on the National Careers Service website need to be transferred to Plotr so it is clear that this is a one-stop site for young people.

Designers should be informed by *My World of Work in Scotland*⁵ and *Gyrfacymru.com* in

4 Hansard HC Col.1WH (16 April 2013) Electronic version. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130516/halltext/130516h0001.htm#13051650000001, accessed 22 May 2013.

5 www.myworldofwork.co.uk/

6 www.careerswales.com/server.php?show=nav.home&outputLang=en

Wales⁶ for ideas about developing a functional website for young people. The Welsh site for example is divided into two sections for different age groups. Both Plotr and the NCS site should have a mobile site and an app to ensure maximum exposure to young people via the medium they are most likely to access from.

The telephone helpline should have a genuinely free number such as an 0808 80 number⁷ to ensure young people are able to access it.

Face time with a careers adviser could be provided at no cost by using a service such as Skype.

- **Young people need to be made aware of the widest possible range of career options, not just the most obvious. Guidelines should be issued to ensure that careers advice always challenges gender stereotypes.**

All young people deserve the highest quality careers guidance. Our research highlights concerns that too much advice is still gender-stereotyped and some young people are being given insufficient information on career routes which may be more vocational or non-traditional. Both schools and careers professionals should be given clearer guidance on how to offer truly independent and fully rounded careers guidance for young people which treats every child's ambition and aspiration as an individual concern.



‘Too much advice is still gender-stereotyped and some young people are being given insufficient information in more vocational career routes.’

⁷ www.helplines.org.uk/directory

Section two: Research background

This research was prompted by concerns about radical policy changes in the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance (careers guidance). These changes included a contraction of face-to-face provision and an increasing reliance on web-based and telephone information services. Because Barnardo's works with over 3,000 disadvantaged young people through our employment, training and skills services we knew from experience that these changes would impact on the young people we work with.

The research set out to discover what use young people themselves made of the emerging technology and what their other experiences of careers guidance had been. Methods were selected which captured the voices and experiences of young people directly, to ensure that they were heard in a context which does not always represent them fairly.

Twenty nine young people aged between 15 and 22 who attended Barnardo's employment, training and skills services in Yorkshire; the North East of England, and East London were interviewed in pairs, or in groups, using a conversational, semi-structured method. Adults who worked to support the young people contributed additional understanding about young people's requirements, and professionals such as Connexions and local authority workers were interviewed to gain practical insights on applying the policy changes.

The report privileges the voices of the young people we spoke to. Their lives and their views should be central to policy developments which will affect the rest of their lives.

Barnardo's expectations of good quality careers guidance

Good quality careers guidance is:

- **face-to-face** – not just online or over the phone
- **proactive, available and accessible** – there when and where young people need it
- **aspirational** – doesn't limit young people's options
- **qualified, informed and impartial** – avoids stereotyped judgements
- **holistic** – has the capacity to focus on barriers when needed
- **outcome, not output focused** – good careers advice is about sustainable employment, not getting into any job.



Section three:

Policy context

This research has been conducted in the context of three significant recent changes to the provision of careers information, advice and guidance (careers guidance). These changes and their impact continue to be the subject of political debate.⁸ This section briefly outlines the substance of these changes before going on to discuss their impact in the main body of the report.

1. Cuts to Connexions services

Connexions was launched in 2000 to provide a universal careers service but with a specific remit to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). It worked with a combination of specialist careers guidance and advice provided by personal advisers (PAs) who were often drawn from a youth and community background. Many PAs developed skills suited to working with the most vulnerable and disengaged young people, often coming to specialise in serious barriers to engagement

such as teenage pregnancy or homelessness. Making this combination of youth work and careers skills mesh together coherently was as one local authority officer described it to us ‘a big ask’. Despite this, those most at risk of being NEET were often well-served by dedicated specialists who understood their needs for intensive support. Although there were sometimes tensions between careers or youth-focused approaches, the advantages of using a youth work approach were that advisers were prepared to leave their offices and find the young people who needed their support, even when they were not attending school.

In 2008 Connexions funding was transferred from central government to local authorities. Subsequently as councils have been required to find 28 per cent savings over the course of the present parliament, Connexions has been one of the hardest hit areas leaving either a decimated or extremely patchy service across



⁸ www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/westminster-hall-debate/

most parts of the country, although local authorities retain a duty to offer a service to this group of vulnerable young people.

2. A duty for school-based advice

Since September 2012 schools have been required to 'secure access to independent careers guidance for pupils in years 9-11' – replacing the previous duty on local authorities to provide universal careers guidance and guidance for all young people (through Connexions). Schools 'should'⁹ offer face-to-face guidance for those pupils who need it 'particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who have special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities',¹⁰ leaving out the below average attainers whose parents only have limited advice to give. This duty was recently extended to cover further education colleges and sixth form colleges.¹¹

Crucially, though, schools have received no additional funding to provide careers guidance despite the fact that local authorities had previously been fully funded to deliver this duty. Furthermore just 13 pages of guidance to schools have been released to accompany this change. It is therefore not surprising that two influential bodies have found the end result to be insufficient.

- A survey by the Institute of Careers Guidance found that schools appeared to be unprepared to deliver this requirement from September¹² with a worrying eight per cent merely looking to direct pupils to online services and other websites which would be inappropriate to meeting this duty fully.
- On 23 January 2013 the Education Select Committee comprehensively reported its findings on the transfer of the duty to provide careers guidance to schools and reported 'concerns about the consistency, quality, independence and impartiality of careers guidance now being offered to young people.'¹³

3. Web-based information and telephone advice

The National Careers Service was launched in April 2012 as the central hub for careers guidance for people of all ages. Guidance from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) suggests 'the service will be able to handle one million helpline calls from adults and 370,000 from young people, and 20 million hits on its website. It will also be able to give 700,000 people face-to-face advice each year'.¹⁴

Websites

The Government set up two new websites offering careers guidance in 2012:

- [The National Careers Service Online](#)¹⁵
- [Plotr](#)¹⁶ for 11 to 24-year-olds.

The National Careers Service website

provides careers guidance for adults predominantly. However, within this site is some information for young people aged 13-19, including details of the telephone helpline, access to a moderated chat room, and an offer of advice by text or email.

Plotr – aimed specifically at young people – is apparently still in development but is nevertheless live online. It includes a Twitter feed and a Facebook link, however at the time of accessing, it only had 60 likes (including this researcher). There is a page for searching local job opportunities which simply links to other job search sites and the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) site. A better developed part of the site is the 'careers world' section which has interactive overviews of several career areas, together with some talking head videos of people explaining how they got into their line of work.

Telephone helpline

The National Careers Service provides a national telephone helpline for 13 to 19-year-olds with a free 0800 number. This is backed up with a text messaging service.

9 Not 'must' – so they only need have regard to this part of the guidance.

10 Education Act 2011, the duty to secure independent and impartial careers guidance for young people in schools (DfE, 27 March 2012) and Section 68 Education and Skills Act 2008.

11 Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) (June 2013) *Securing independent careers guidance: guidance for further education colleges and sixth form colleges*.

12 *Children and Young People Now* (21 February 2012) *One in three schools has no plan to deliver careers advice*.

13 www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/632/63203.htm

14 National Careers Service (2012) *The right advice at the right time*. Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS).

15 <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

16 <https://www.plotr.co.uk/>

Section four: Analysis

This section of the report summarises what young people and professionals from Barnardo's services told us about the impact these recent policy changes are having on the provision of careers guidance. Where appropriate we have used the actual words of the interviewees to describe their impressions and experiences.

The young people most affected

Firstly, it is important to note that the young people Barnardo's is most concerned are being affected by cuts and changes to careers guidance are not those most obviously vulnerable to being not in education, employment and training (NEET), nor those destined for higher education or advanced apprenticeships, but instead the group somewhere in the middle of these extremes.

Many of the young people Barnardo's works with in its employment, training and skills services might have been disengaged with formal education or received unsatisfactory careers education and guidance at school. But not all are vulnerable to being NEET. Although poorly engaged with school, and often with low attainment at GCSE, these young people now want to work and have ambitions. Parents and family of this group are often supportive, but at a loss to give careers guidance beyond their own day-to-day experience, meaning that these young people are presented with a predictable and narrow range of career options which limits their future outcomes.

This means these young people often drift into unsuitable, short-term or dead-end jobs when, with some support, they might be encouraged into careers with better options for progression. Some of the young people we interviewed had ambitions to set up their own businesses. Those training to be chefs, in particular, showed a great deal of entrepreneurial spirit and there is no reason why their peers should not have also been similarly ambitious with the right guidance

and advice. However, whilst school leavers who end up NEET continue to receive intensive support from the local authority and outreach from specialist workers, perversely their more ambitious peers who had merely mediocre, or below average attainment, are often ineligible for further support and are left unsure how to fulfil their aspirations and potential.

It is this group who would particularly benefit from proactive, face-to-face intervention which is consistent and persistent, enabling them to make a successful transition to sustainable employment, learning or training. This analysis shows how the new arrangements neglect this significant set¹⁷ of young people and risk them becoming NEET further down the line by limiting their options to do fulfilling work that they can make progress in.

Gender stereotyping and the role of careers guidance in broadening horizons

One predictable but depressing finding of this research is how a large proportion of careers guidance continues to be gender-specific, despite the radical and ongoing changes to gender roles and expectations over recent decades. This is in line with findings by Ofsted about girls' career aspirations.¹⁸

For example, we spoke to sisters Habibah and Hazar in Yorkshire who were both studying Level one childcare, although, as Hazar complained, *'it's not really my thing'*. Both girls told us they would have preferred to do hairdressing and had had some beauty training, but when asked why they were doing childcare they replied:

'All the girls here do childcare, and all the boys do sport.'

It was clear both sisters simply accepted the limited expectations others had of them, whereas with quality careers guidance both girls might have been guided into something more appropriate to their skills and their

¹⁷ www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/schools/performance/2011/group.pl?qttype=NAT&supervision=sec about 42 per cent of students do not achieve five A*-C GCSEs including maths and English.

¹⁸ Ofsted (April 2011) *Girls' Career Aspirations* (report 090239).



interests. The evidence that young people need more guidance to help them raise their aspirations beyond limited options – construction for boys and ‘hair or care’ for girls – was illustrated by one girl who explained:

‘They [the school careers adviser] just asked us what we wanted to do, and I didn’t know what I could do.’

Some were very influenced by parents, especially fathers. So one young man was clear that he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a pipefitter on the oil rigs, although it seemed certain he wouldn’t get enough GCSEs for the apprenticeship. It is unclear whether anyone had discussed this potential stumbling block with him, or suggested other potential careers or ways to reach his goal.

Another bright young man said:

‘I wanted to work with my dad, so in year 10, the school sorted it out for me to do a construction course.’

Whilst this school obviously acted with the best intentions for one of its pupils, it is unclear how much support the young man had received in coming to his decision. Whilst it may yet prove to have been the right

decision in this case, it is to be hoped that this young man was also supported to consider other options from beyond the example of his immediate family – something that quality careers guidance should encourage.

It is important to remember lack of variety and inspiration is a block on social mobility because it fails to recognise the young person’s individual talents, choices and aptitudes which may well be different from their parents’ sometimes limited experience. Above all they need detailed guidance from someone who knows about many suitable options and how to achieve them.

The impact of service cuts

It is also important to note that Barnardo’s recognises that access to careers guidance has long – if not always – been patchy, pre-dating the changes focused on by this report. We do not allude to a ‘golden age of Connexions’ or indeed any time before that (although amongst professionals of longstanding, we noted that some nostalgia is evident). Nevertheless we are concerned that the recent changes make it harder for the majority of young people to find and receive good quality careers guidance rather than easier.

19 For example *Half of Students not getting Connexions Careers Advice*, Association of Colleges, 2004 www.aoc.co.uk/en/newsroom/aoc_news_releases.cfm/id/1B5F6B71-C10C-4D95-888ED51F5F67416D/page/47, accessed 28 February 2013.

20 And still does in those areas where it continues to exist.

Although there has been debate¹⁹ about the effectiveness of Connexions, what it undoubtedly did well²⁰ was to provide face-to-face advice to the young people who needed it most. This included, not just NEET young people who continue to receive intensive support, but a large group of young people who were unlikely to get the careers guidance that they need from anywhere else. The youth work background of many Connexions PAs meant that they were specialists in proactively engaging young people and finding them outside of school settings. Now young people may have to wait for a Connexions appointment often with an overburdened worker. As one Barnardo's service manager pointed out: *'the only young people being supported at the moment are those that are homeless.'*

Similarly a support worker at The Base in Whitley Bay explained that young people who were pregnant, or had been in care were still receiving good quality, regular support from a Connexions personal adviser. On the other hand, she spoke about Jim who... *'...has plans, but not the GCSE grades. He may be dyslexic. He is able enough to continue, but I don't think there is enough for them.'*

There is evidence that some areas are working innovatively to protect services as best they can. In North Tyneside, for example, we found that the service had imaginatively made savings on office space by setting up drop-in sessions in local libraries and youth centres instead. However, in other areas it was clear the pressures to make savings to the council's overall budget had forced the Connexions Service to be pared back drastically, or even scrapped altogether.

Independence of careers guidance in schools

Although this report is critical of the quality of much careers guidance available to young people, Barnardo's nevertheless recognises the extreme pressures on schools in the present economic climate. The transfer of the duty to secure independent careers guidance for young

people from local authorities has ostensibly been driven by a wider localisation agenda which has seen more independence passed to schools generally through academisation and other means. However, without additional money to pay for specialist advisers it is likely many schools will struggle to deliver quality independent careers guidance to their pupils – and early evidence suggests that in many cases schools are reducing the provision available.²¹

Our discussions suggested this underfunding creates several risks. Firstly, there is a question about how far schools can be expected to deliver impartial careers guidance. The duty on schools has been transferred from local authorities *'recognising the critical role that schools play in young people's lives, and the importance of achievement at school in laying the foundations for life and work'*.²²

Significantly, the duty includes a requirement for schools to give independent and impartial advice and guidance – a point specifically emphasised in statutory guidance issued in 2013.²³



²¹ www.careersengland.org.uk/documents/public/CE%20school%20survey%20REPORT%2020.11.12%20for%20publication%200930%2021.11.12.pdf

²² National Careers Service (2012) *The right advice at the right time*. Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS).

²³ Department for Education (2013) *Statutory guidance: The duty to secure independent and impartial careers guidance for young people in schools*. DfE, London.

²⁴ A Barnardo's project teaching skills to disadvantaged young people to help them into the employment market.

However, paradoxically this research found that it is *because* schools know their students well that it can be hard for them to be unbiased. Two young women at Barnardo's Palmersville training centre²⁴ demonstrated this in contrasting ways. One woman described the variety of jobs she had done before coming to Palmersville to train for her long-held ambition to be a hairdresser: *'I didn't really know what I wanted to do. In school you always get told that you need to go to university and that. You don't get taught much about trades and that. It was just go to sixth form, or go to college, but when you're not the academic kind you don't want to do that.'*

Because of the funding that follows students, there is evidence schools may be over-inclined to persuade them into the school sixth form – even when they might be better suited to studying elsewhere.²⁵ Often this can lead to young people dropping out further down the line:

'I finished my AS-levels but didn't stay on to the second year to do A-levels. It was too boring.'

Young people can be surprisingly willing to please the adults in their lives and fall in with their suggestions. In this girl's case it took great determination and a redundancy to finally follow her aspirations in her early 20s.

A girl training to be a decorator had been told not to apply for college or sixth form:

'I used to be naughty at school and the teachers told me I wouldn't get in. They didn't even let us apply; they just told us we wouldn't get in.'

There must be a temptation on the part of a school to move difficult pupils on after year 11, so affecting their impartiality. Because young people often go along with adult suggestions many would not challenge this.

Schools' ability to provide face-to-face guidance

Another consequence of the cost pressures on schools is that they are often unable to deliver adequate face-to-face careers guidance, even if only to the pupils deemed most in need. This is despite clear government advice on offering face-to-face opportunities ***'where it is the most suitable support for young people to make successful transitions, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who have special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities'***.²⁶

For instance, Betty had been to a group session at school where she was simply asked what she wanted to do. She did not feel this was thorough enough; she had been hoping for some suggestions of what she could do. She was promised a further, private session but was disappointed that this had not yet happened and she had not been told when it might take place. Like many young people she was fired with enthusiasm and understandably impatient to organise her future plans. Young people can quickly become disillusioned without responsive, timely guidance. Many of the young people we spoke to were reluctant to make forward



²⁵ This conflict of interest between schools budgets and the needs of individual learners was highlighted within the recent Select Committee report – *Education Committee Seventh Report: Careers Guidance for Young People – the impact of the new duty on schools* (HMSO, 2013).

²⁶ Department for Education (2013) *Statutory guidance: The duty to secure independent and impartial careers guidance for young people in schools*. DfE, London.

²⁷ A Barnardo's project teaching skills to disadvantaged young people to help them into the employment market.

appointments with advisers and Connexions workers, which is why for many a drop-in arrangement works well. Meanwhile Betty was attending a Dr B's training restaurant²⁷ two days a week, so was not at school for some of the time. She was clearly anxious about missing future careers sessions through the school.

The contrast between pupils receiving proactive face-to-face careers information, advice and guidance and those getting an occasional session at school was illustrated by a mixed group at one of our services in the North East – some attending an education support centre and others attending a local school. The young people attending the education support centre had regular visits from a Connexions adviser and received face-to-face guidance. By contrast the school pupils agreed they had not had much, if any, careers guidance. Lee said he didn't think it was very good: *'No one came and there was nothing. No talk or lessons or anything. I haven't missed a lot of school either.'*

The students from the support centre were the only ones interviewed for this research who had original aspirations for their careers ranging from accountancy to engineering. The school pupils in the same group had limited, or gendered, ideas about their future careers, in common with most of the other young people we interviewed. This group demonstrated the value of well-informed, empathetic advice and guidance given face-to-face in helping young people. Without the rich information they needed to help them select a career path, several of the school pupils appeared to have settled for this limited vision of their capabilities and potential, which is likely to impact on their ability to realise a fulfilling career in the future and their social mobility.

Reaching young people not at school

The final risk of under-funded careers guidance provision identified by this



research is that just one session will be on offer at school which cannot be repeated if the young person does not attend it. As part of this research we asked young people about the careers guidance they had received at school. The responses we received were concerning. For example, Jason at the Hub construction training centre in East London explained that, while he had been attending work-based training his fellow pupils in mainstream school were learning how to write a CV. At a later date he was subsequently not allowed to attend a careers guidance session as he had no CV.

Jason felt rejected by this experience, but more seriously it is also likely to have undermined his trust in careers guidance as a whole. Other young people who were poorly engaged with school told us they saw in-school careers sessions as something that could be skipped, often on the flimsy advice of their peers.

'The school counsellor could arrange for someone to come in and give advice, but I heard from other people that it wasn't worth it. They had it off the adviser and they said it was terrible, so I just didn't bother. I thought "what's the point going to all that trouble" – to find out that you can actually do better than they are saying.'

²⁸ <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/sfr10-2013.pdf>



Two hundred thousand secondary school pupils were persistently absent from schools in 2011-12, with the greatest proportions coming from deprived areas or disadvantaged backgrounds.²⁸ Many other young people fall short of being described as ‘persistently absent’ but may truant regularly, be excluded, have poor health, or just not be paying attention. Careers advice is one of the many important lessons they will miss out on. This raises particular concerns for young people whose attendance is irregular, for whatever reason.

Whilst schools are trying their best to offer careers guidance, the lack of resources places limits on how far they can accommodate the specific needs of pupils such as Jason and Betty. Certain groups of young people are at risk of missing out on support through no fault of their own – not just poor attenders but other young people who are out of school for a range of legitimate reasons such as because they are ill, in training, formally excluded, or attending vocational courses at college part-time. Barnardo’s workers know (some of them are ex-Connexions workers) that these young people benefit from a persistent approach, not a tick box attitude.

Schools need to be fully empowered to deliver careers guidance – for example further clarification is needed by schools on their responsibilities for providing guidance; on what quality provision looks like; and how they can manage their budgets effectively to provide this. But in order to reach all young people it is also important that careers guidance is available in a variety of other settings too – for example at youth centres, or in pupil referral units, vocational training centres and colleges.

Local authorities’ continued duties and best practice

However, although schools have now inherited a duty to secure independent careers guidance for their pupils, local authorities retain a responsibility to provide a service to the young people most vulnerable to becoming NEET. Some local authorities are going beyond that duty and also work together with schools in their area to support high quality, consistent careers guidance.

In the two local authority areas in the North of England where part of this research was conducted, each authority was helping the schools to manage this new demand. In one area, 30 out of 32 secondary schools had agreed to contribute to shared provision via the local authority’s outsourced Connexions provider. Sharing costs means that they are reduced and, according to the local authority, this allows them to control quality, standards and consistency.

These examples of good practice demonstrate how many local authorities and schools are constructively working together to create efficiencies and deliver quality careers guidance for their young people. However, as cuts on local authority budgets will carry on until 2015, it is unclear whether models of good practice will continue. For example, we found one authority offering schools a discounted price on its remaining Connexions service, but it was not certain of being able

to sustain this indefinitely. There is also a concern that two closely overlapping duties on different institutions at a time of budget cuts, risks some young people falling through the net – it is important local authorities and schools continue to work closely together to ensure young people receive the careers guidance they need.

Web-based careers guidance for young people

When the National Careers Service was originally announced in November 2010 (then as the ‘All Age Careers Service’) the reason given by then minister John Hayes was to join up careers guidance services for young people and adults holistically to better manage the transition between education and work: ***‘A single, unified careers service would provide major benefits in terms of transparency and accessibility... would have more credibility for people within it as well as users... [and] the ability to support young people more effectively during their transition to adulthood.’***²⁹

It was only later that it began to become clear that the bulk of the new service would be offered remotely, not face-to-face, and previously associated resources would not be transferred into the new service. This has meant that no clear rationale has ever been put forward by government to justify the transfer of many services online – and in this absence some commentators have surmised this move to simply be a cost-cutting measure.³⁰

Regardless of the reasons behind the shift to web and phone-based careers guidance, it might be assumed that young people would benefit most from this shift, being as they belong to a generation which has grown up using such innovations throughout their lives. However, the interviews with the young people involved in this research painted a very different picture.

Young people were keen to use technology for social purposes. Across the country the consistent response was that almost all were frequent users of BlackBerry Messenger, and visitors to Facebook (to the extent that some services had blocked access to the site) and some also specified Twitter and ‘*music sites*’.

One young man used Skype to keep in touch with his father who worked on the oil rigs, and boys in particular, played a lot of online games. In fact one boy said he had received careers guidance from someone he met online while playing *Call of Duty*:

‘It sounds stupid, but my mate over Xbox he was a chef and every time he came on I asked how’s work been and I took a real interest in what he did so he said “John why don’t you take catering into consideration cos you’re so keen”. He became a head chef at the age of 18. So he said to try it out and I haven’t regretted it.’

However, the young people we spoke to were not always as digitally literate as might be expected by policy makers. Their affinity for social networking (nearly all those interviewed were on BlackBerry Messenger during the conversation with researchers) was often in stark contrast with their ability to use the internet in other ways. Many seemed unclear about how they could use a search engine to find more information about potential careers online. Others only had limited access to the internet through their phones or crowded facilities in schools or youth clubs.

As one worker remarked around the assumption that young people will proactively search the internet to obtain careers advice: ***‘I don’t think it is a good idea in terms of our young people. I don’t think it is something they would actively seek. It would have to be something we would do here, looking over their shoulder, and saying “this is what you are looking for” because we’ve already coaxed that info out of them, because they***

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/new-all-age-careers-service>

³⁰ www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/may/10/all-age-career-service-money

³¹ <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/facts/>

have no idea what they want to do. They don't know where to start plus some of them can't read. It has to be done verbally.'

We do not know what young people thought of Plotr or the NCS site as none of those interviewed were aware of them. This raises questions about how effectively both sites are reaching out to young people. At the time of writing neither website has a mobile version, making it difficult to use on a smartphone – the everyday way in which most young people, (and increasing numbers of adults) access the internet³¹ at much less cost than through a personal laptop and broadband connection. It is recognised that the National Careers Service website is designed for all ages, but the elements which are aimed at young people – such as the moderated chat room – are well-hidden within the adult website and required an informed search to find the links. Several of our interviewees had looked at the National Apprenticeship Service site for training opportunities. To do this they had had face-to-face guidance and support from Barnardo's workers; they would be unlikely to find this site and sign up to it without this

encouragement. A young woman who was deaf had found the old Next Steps site very helpful, finding that the quizzes and aptitude tests boosted her confidence.

When asked about getting advice and information from websites young people continued to express a preference for face-to-face advice:

'Oh. Neil can do that. If you know the person it's alright.'

'I ask my dad about everything.'

'I would rather have someone actually come and speak to us about it. When you are reading something you don't take as much in as someone actually talking to you.'

For many young people it seems there is a issue around trust and authenticity about the advice given to them – this is often engendered by a personal relationship.



Telephone helpline

Although all the young people had smartphones, few were using them to make many phone calls – indeed some were reluctant to make calls of any sort. One girl explained she had a hearing impairment, and a young man was conscious of having a stammer, but most of the others simply lacked the confidence to pick up the phone and speak to even known adults, let alone a stranger. As a support worker explained:

‘Asking about work experience, “what areas do you think you need help with?” they say “I don’t like talking on the phone”. It is massive for them. They say “Joy you do it”; you have to coach them how to make a phone call and what to say and it is quite a big deal really. You forget that. Nerve-racking for them.’

There were also issues around how far the helpline could offer locally tailored knowledge – the careers telephone helpline for 13 to 19-year-olds is a national provision. It can only give information and advice on a national basis. For example, a telephone adviser based in the North East said he would ‘defer to Connexions’ if a young person needed information about local opportunities – however, he also acknowledged that Connexions services had become thin on the ground. Locality is vital for young people, particularly vulnerable young people who often have never travelled far beyond their home environment. Without local knowledge young people are only going to be able to get part of the support they need – for example finding out they need to access a catering qualification, but needing to go elsewhere to find out where they can access a college offering the appropriate course.

Finally the number is a 0800 number, free from a landline, but which could be charged up to 40p per minute by some mobile companies. As general access to landlines further declines (such as the removal of most public call boxes) this raises real issues for young people who are frequent users of mobile phones – indeed a recent survey suggested that half of young people aged 18-34 have given up using a landline altogether.³² The helpline does recognise this issue and offers a call back service – but even to do this it took over 50 seconds to navigate two menus to speak to an adviser. This is potentially another barrier to young people – particularly the most vulnerable young people likely to be from low income homes – being able to effectively utilise the helpline. One solution could be to offer careers guidance service via Skype or similar service therefore providing a degree of face time to young people at no cost.

The National Careers Helpline is again, a potentially useful aspect of provision – but only as part of a wider menu of services. Although the advisers on the helpline may be well-qualified and have a helpful attitude, any advice they can give is necessarily limited.

Our findings raise questions about the effectiveness of the Government transferring a large amount of careers information and advice online or through a telephone helpline when many young people will be unable to access them in the manner intended. Websites can play a part in helping to deliver information about future careers, but for careers guidance to be effective many young people still need to use the information received online in conjunction with advice

‘They say “I don’t like talking on the phone.” It is massive for them.’



³² www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2047625/Half-people-30-admit-using-home-phone.html. It is reasonable to project that this trend away from using landlines is likely to be even more pronounced for the under-18 age group.

Section five: Conclusions and recommendations

In the past 12 months substantive changes have been made to the provision of careers information, advice and guidance for young people aged 14-19. This paper has examined the guidance, scrutinised the resources, and interviewed some of the young people and professionals affected by these massive changes. Our research concludes that the changes have been made with two main objectives: firstly, the understandable need in a time of austerity to save money, and secondly an ideological drive to reduce bureaucracy. The end result of these two drivers is a much-reduced and underfunded service which limits the choices and opportunities for young people to pursue their aspirations and gain meaningful, sustainable employment. In particular, the paucity of guidance and lack of funding for schools to deliver careers guidance leaves pupils with below average achievement, attainment and attendance without the necessary support to develop their ambitions.

Rather than being driven by a desire to reduce costs and paperwork, careers provision for young people should place the young people's needs at the centre of the service. If young people receive adequate, tailored, and encouraging careers guidance they will be less at risk of becoming NEET or churning in and out of low paid jobs. It is this which will save money in the long term, not restricting the advice available at source. This means that young people should receive pro-active careers interventions which challenge and expand their aspirations beyond the constraints of gender and a commonplace selection of jobs. Careers advice should set out to reach all young people who need it, and be delivered in ways and in places that suit their circumstances. This may not be in school for poor attenders, and it may require more than one appointment with an adviser to help the young person to fully realise their ambitions. Families can make an important contribution to young people's

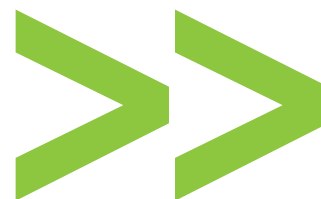
career decisions, but many families cannot access the full range of possibilities open to young people and can only speak about what they know. This is a potential block on social mobility - young people deserve to have the fullest range of options presented to them in order to progress.

With increasing digitisation of government services, more research is required about what use young people make of technology and what would help them to get into the habit of using IT to access services. Our research found that young people are motivated by a desire to communicate, and to game, and the way they use the internet reflects those motivations. Current careers websites are not in tune with these social impulses and are therefore not being used by young people. All of the young people interviewed for this research wanted to talk, face-to-face, with an informed adviser, who understood them and the local labour market they were poised to enter. This is not a need which can be filled with websites or national telephone helplines.



Our conclusions can be summarised as follows:

- With quality careers guidance disadvantaged young people stand a better chance of fulfilling their ambitions in the labour market.
- The young people most likely to be missing out on careers guidance are not the NEET group, but those just above this group in terms of attainment.
- Face-to-face advice is vitally important for quality careers guidance to be provided effectively to young people.
- It is disadvantaged young people who are most reliant on state services to help them as they are least likely to be able to access reliable face-to-face guidance informally outside of school.
- Some young people are at risk of missing out on careers guidance if it is not available outside school and in more individualised formats.
- Careers guidance services are inevitably being hit by cuts. Where careers guidance works well, local authorities and schools are working together. There needs to be better synergy between their respective duties in relation to careers guidance.
- There is still too much gender-stereotyping in careers guidance. More needs to be done to encourage diversity of aspiration for all children regardless of gender.
- Independence of careers guidance in schools is not currently guaranteed. Schools need to be helped to increase the depth and diversity of their careers guidance provision.
- Young people are not as digitally competent as is often perceived. Web and telephone surveys can only be part of the solution – they need to be better accessible for young people and policy makers must recommend they are most effectively used in conjunction with adult support.



Our recommendations based on these findings are as follows:

- **Careers guidance must be more readily available beyond schools.**

The group of young people who would benefit most from quality careers guidance – neither those most obviously vulnerable to being NEET, nor those destined for higher education or advanced apprenticeships, but instead those somewhere in the middle of these extremes – are among those least likely to receive it, often because they are not always able or willing to access it in schools. Policy makers must explore how we can ensure a menu of careers guidance is readily available beyond the school gates to help intervene earlier with these ambitious, but disadvantaged, young people.

- **Face-to-face careers guidance must be guaranteed for all young people who ask for it.**

It is clear from our research that there is no effective substitute for quality face-to-face careers guidance. Although there is valuable information contained in the new websites set up by the Government, young people will only be able to use it effectively in conjunction with adult support. Otherwise they will look for face-to-face advice from any source if experts are not accessible to them in person. This results in limited understanding of the options available to them and increased propensity to fall through the net towards poor outcomes.

- **Schools need better guidance on how to offer quality careers guidance to their pupils, and provision in schools should be benchmarked to national standards which can be assessed within Ofsted inspections.**

Whilst there is no clarity or accountability

around schools' duty to provide independent careers guidance, it is likely services in schools will remain patchy at best. Government needs to more clearly indicate how much resource schools are expected to devote to providing effective careers guidance, and national standards should be put in place so the quality of provision can be more clearly assessed within the Ofsted inspection regime.

- **The local authority role in respect of careers guidance should be clarified and best practice examples of schools and local authorities working together on this issue should be shared more widely.**

Research for this report uncovered some good examples of local authorities continuing to support local schools in providing careers guidance. This is a shared problem, but our report suggests this link is not always clear in all areas. Government must further clarify how the overlapping responsibilities of schools and local authorities can best be drawn together. It is recommended that best practice case studies of the sort we have uncovered are disseminated to demonstrate how to create more effective services for young people despite the harsh economic climate.

- **Remote careers guidance needs to be better promoted and made more 'user-friendly' in order to reach the young people it is designed to help.**

Plotr still needs considerable development and a proper launch to raise awareness amongst the people expected to use it. The sections for young people on the National Careers Service website need to be transferred to Plotr so it is clear that this is a one-stop site for young people.

Designers should be informed by *My World of Work* in Scotland³³ and *Gyrffacymru.com* in Wales³⁴ for ideas about developing

³³ www.myworldofwork.co.uk/

³⁴ www.careerswales.com/server.php?show=nav.home&outputLang=en

a functional website for young people. The Welsh site for example is divided into two sections for different age groups. Both Plotr and the NCS site should have a mobile site and an app to ensure maximum exposure to young people via the medium they are most likely to access from.

The telephone helpline should have a genuinely free number such as an 0808 80 number³⁵ to ensure young people are able to access it.

Face time with a careers adviser could be provided at no cost by using a service such as Skype.

- **Young people need to be made aware of the widest possible range of career options, not just the most obvious. Guidelines should be issued to ensure that careers advice always challenges gender stereotypes.**

All young people deserve the highest quality careers guidance. Our research highlights concerns that too much advice is still gender-stereotyped and some young people are being given insufficient information on career routes which may be more vocational or non-traditional. Both schools and careers professionals should be given clearer guidance on how to offer truly independent and fully rounded careers guidance for young people which treats every child's ambition and aspiration as an individual concern.



³⁵ www.helplines.org.uk/directory



www.barnardos.org.uk

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