

## GMT interview

# The National Careers Council: a new era for careers work in England

With Dr Deirdre Hughes, OBE

**During times of change people need access to reliable sources of information to help them make informed decisions about their futures; the Coalition Government is no different and have put together the National Careers Council for England (the Council) to advise them on the future opportunities for careers services in England. In this article we interview, the Chair of the Council, Dr Deirdre Hughes, OBE<sup>1</sup> and ask what role the Council will play in helping the Government achieve the right balance of national and local careers systems to support young people and adults in making well informed and realistic learning and work decisions in a complex and challenging labour market.**

**As Chair of the National Careers Council for England (the Council) please could you tell us more about why the Council was formed and what are its aims and objectives?**

In April 2012, the Coalition Government's vision for a better quality of information, advice and guidance on learning and work was set out in the document *The right advice at the right time*<sup>2</sup>, the month a new National Careers Service<sup>3</sup> (NCS) was launched. At the time, this heralded a new beginning for 'an all-age careers service' in England. Shortly afterwards, the former Skills Minister (John Hayes) announced his intention to create a National Careers Council stating: 'The National Council for Careers will help to create a new beginning in careers guidance by improving professionalism, forging links with business and ensuring advice reflects the competition and complexity of the labour market'<sup>4</sup>. Since the appointment of Matthew Hancock (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills) in September

2012, the Council has continued with its task to produce an annual report to government in May 2013. The aim is to set out a future vision for the NCS and wider careers support market.

We all know this generation of young people and adults face tough competition for jobs and the balance of occupations in the economy is rapidly changing. A coherent national and local careers system is required which helps people make well informed and realistic learning and work decisions. The Council's primary objective is to advise the Coalition Government on future possibilities for careers services in England, set within a context of major technological, economical, social and political change. This is a very dynamic, fast changing and challenging environment. In our first annual report, we aim to create a high profile dialogue on how best to deliver high impact careers provision to young people and adults. I see this in the context of a new era for careers work bringing to the forefront the unique contribution of careers information, advice and guidance that supports raising aspirations, achievement and ambitions of young people and adults in a rapidly changing global economy.

**What are the key themes underpinning the National Careers Council's work and how will you know if the Council has made a difference?**

For the first time, the careers sector has a direct line into Government at a cross-departmental and non-government departmental body level. The Council has brought together officials from the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Education (DfE) and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to review careers policies. The initial focus is on three broad

<sup>1</sup> Dr Deirdre Hughes, OBE, is the Chair of the National Careers Council for England, Commissioner of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and Associate Fellow at Warwick Institute for Employment Research.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-careers-service-the-right-advice-at-the-right-time>

<sup>3</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121205150610/http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/national-careers-service-for-england>

<sup>4</sup> <http://news.bis.gov.uk/Press-Releases/New-National-Council-to-raise-standards-of-careers-advice-679d9.aspx>

themes which include: (i) intelligence, innovation and impact; (ii) connectivity of the NCS to business and the wider careers market (including higher education careers advisory services); and (iii) access, quality and professionalism. The Council has met with Ministers and representatives from over 85 organisations (including representatives from the higher education sector), to systematically review evidence from national and international policy and research findings, and contributed to the Heseltine Review<sup>5</sup>, Richard Review<sup>6</sup>, and the Education Select Committee's Inquiry into careers guidance<sup>7</sup>. We know that considerable evidence exists to demonstrate a relationship between clarity of career goals and educational attainment<sup>8</sup>, and there is a strong theoretical basis for the effect of careers education and guidance on attainment and associated behaviour<sup>9</sup> and on student performance.<sup>10</sup> We also know that as budgets tighten in the next Comprehensive Spending Review, there will be a growing need to have a strong narrative and evidence-base that convinces Treasury (as well as leaders in schools, colleges and universities) that investment in careers services yield positive educational, social and economic returns.

The issue of how employers connect to and value the work of careers services and careers professionals has also been scrutinised closely by the Council.

Personally, I will know the Council has made a difference if, in the short and medium term, the Coalition Government accepts and implements our recommendations. More importantly, I hope that our work contributes towards improving the life chances of individuals, especially those facing tough decisions regarding their personal and financial investment in learning and work. The recent Heseltine Review (2012)<sup>11</sup> argues that:

*'One of the most oft-repeated, but also most frequently ignored recommendations in the field of UK vocational education and training (VET) over the last 30 years has been the need for more and better careers information, advice and guidance.'*

(Keep, quoted in the Heseletine Review: 22)

### **The National Careers Service (NCS), introduced in April 2012, was proposed to be an 'all-age' careers service yet has been criticised for its focus on vulnerable adults at risk of unemployment.**

The National Careers Service (NCS) has recently celebrated its first year in operation. We have learned that the NCS focus has adjusted over time in response to new and evolving policies at a national and regional level. The role and remit of the NCS could be strengthened further and it is timely to set out a future strategic vision before plans for the next round of NCS procurement takes place from summer 2013 onwards. Also, this new vision should be a catalyst for further debate on how best to create a more visible and accessible 'all-age careers service'. There is an urgent imperative in England (and elsewhere in Europe and further afield) to secure an appropriate balance between providing core services to all (avoiding 'marginalising the mainstream') and targeting intensive services to those who need them most. Given careers guidance policies and provision are located within and across a range of sectors (e.g. schools, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, and employment) careers services to individuals need to be as seamless as possible. I believe it is vital to develop strategies that will help make good quality careers provision accessible to all whilst avoiding over-serving or under-serving individual requirements. Of course, this is easy to say this but much harder to achieve in the realities of grass roots policies and practices. Nonetheless, this is a challenge that has to be addressed. Access to career guidance services for adults at times of transition is crucial for positive outcomes both for the individual and smooth functioning of the labour market (Brown and Bimrose, 2012)<sup>12</sup>. Some argue for change in transition points to take account of demographic shifts (Schuller & Watson, 2009)<sup>13</sup> focusing on those up to 25, 25–50, 50–75, 75+. This is contested territory, for example, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2012)<sup>14</sup> highlights the need to create

<sup>5</sup> See: [www.gov.uk/the-national-careers-council](http://www.gov.uk/the-national-careers-council)

<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit.

<sup>7</sup> Op.Cit.

<sup>8</sup> Inter-Ed (2004). *Career Goals and Educational Attainment: What is the Link?* Glasgow: Careers Scotland.

<sup>9</sup> Killeen, J., Sammons, P. & Watts, A.G. (1999). *The Effects of Careers Education and Guidance on Attainment and Associated Behaviour*. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Lapan, R., Gysbers, N. & Sun, Y. (1997). The impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on the school experiences of high school students: a state-wide evaluation study. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 75, 292-302.

<sup>11</sup> Heseltine Review (2012) *No Stone Unturned in Pursuit of Growth*, The Rt Hon. The Lord Heseltine of Thenford CH, London: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, October 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, A. and Bimrose, J. (2012) 'Role of vocational training and learning at work in individual career development across the life-course: examples from across Europe', in *Beruflichkeit zwischen institutionellem Wandel und biographischem Projekt, (Bildung und Arbeit series), (German Edition), [Professionalism between institutional change and biographical project]*, 167- 188, Editors: A. Bolder, R. Dobischat, G. Kutscha, & G. Reutter, G., Wiesbaden: Springer

<sup>13</sup> Schuller, T. & Watson, D. (2009) *Learning Through Life Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning Summary*. Leicester: National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ukces.org.uk/assets/ukces/docs/publications/the-youth-employment-challenge.pdf>

more career opportunities for young people given this group have suffered disproportionately in the current economic downturn. The recent Select Committee Inquiry into careers education for young people<sup>15</sup> also makes a case for greater investment by Government in this regard. Achieving the right balance in service and funding allocation is difficult, especially in austere times, but this is something that has to be reconciled. With pressures on the public purse, an ageing society and the need to stimulate greater investments and added value returns for participation in learning and work, innovative and creative new approaches are required. Clearly the recent empowerment of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to drive forward growth in their local areas, the future role of the NCS and higher education involvement is significant in this regard.

### Could this shift in policy enhance social mobility?

I'm not convinced any shifts in policy will *guarantee* social mobility; however, by putting the spotlight on the NCS and wider careers support market this heightens everyone's awareness of social equality and inclusion and individuals' access (or otherwise) to educational and labour market opportunities. As Alan Milburn states: 'there's plenty of research that shows you need careers advice to improve social mobility' (p.5)<sup>16</sup>. We know that careers services also support economic efficiency, make the labour market operate more effectively by reducing drop-outs from education and training, and reduce mismatches in supply and demand, and market failure by helping ensure that individuals maximise their talents. These are key points which can easily be overlooked by disinterested parties. As new policy developments emerge within the Welfare Reform Agenda, Industrial and Skills Strategies (including higher education, apprenticeships and traineeships) a common theme emerging is greater emphasis on 'outcomes' and for individuals to have access to 'trusted information' from reliable sources. I would like to see more stability in the careers system and individuals having access to trusted information. Having worked in at least four universities, I am very mindful of the wealth of expertise in career development and employability content-rich resources. There is a real opportunity to do something innovative and impacting to inform and support the talent pipeline and careers support mechanisms that feed into higher education.

Destination measures and Key Information Sets (KIS) play a key role here, and the career, employability and work-related activities on offer need to be communicated more readily to help inform student choices. Whilst competition exists between institutions, I believe there is scope to explore new ways of sharing careers and employability resources at a local and national level, if there is a will to do so.

### Do you think the changes to the provision of careers information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges will impact upon applications to higher education in the future?

This is a contentious and important topic for debate. Admissions to higher education are under pressure for many reasons, including tuition fee increases and mixed messages being received by young people and adults on the likely economic returns on investment from higher education study. Clearly, the range and quality of careers information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges does have a direct impact upon applications to higher education, as outlined in recent findings on *Pre-HE Advice and Guidance* (Future Track, HECSU, 2012)<sup>17</sup>. If students fail to act in a well informed way, and do not have the confidence and contacts to make successful transitions then the consequences are far reaching for individuals, communities and the UK economy. Devolving the statutory duty to schools to secure independent and impartial careers guidance is new and uncharted territory in England. I am worried that we do not know for sure whether this approach will improve students (and parents') access to high quality careers provision. The Council has worked with OfSTED to support its early development work on the careers thematic review. OfSTED findings and the Council report to government in the summer will provide an important assessment of progress.

### The tenet of 'impartiality' lies at the core of careers guidance practice; how do the new arrangements ensure that impartiality continues to be central in the provision of careers guidance?

Section 29 of the Education Act (2011)<sup>18</sup> placed schools under a duty to secure access to independent careers guidance for young people. Recent updated guidance from DfE for schools and local authorities asserts the statutory requirement for 'impartiality' which is obviously essential in a complex and

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/substantive-careers-guidance/>

<sup>16</sup> Milburn, A. (2012) *Social mobility in higher education*. GMT Spring, 2012. Manchester: Higher Education Careers Service Unit.

<sup>17</sup> HECSU (2012) *Pre-HE Advice & Guidance: Information about choices and options*. Manchester: Higher Education Careers Services Unit in association with Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Coventry. Visit: [http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Futuretrack\\_Summary\\_2012\\_-\\_Pre-HE\\_advice\\_and\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Futuretrack_Summary_2012_-_Pre-HE_advice_and_guidance.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/21/section/29>

competitive market place. From September 2013, the duty will be extended to include all registered pupils in year 9 (12-13 year olds) and years 12-13 (16-18 year olds). The Government plans to extend an equivalent requirement for Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges through their funding agreements and will provide separate guidance to colleges. It will be very interesting to observe how this unfolds over time.

I was involved in earlier work undertaken by the Careers Profession Taskforce (2010)<sup>19</sup> which highlighted that a new thematic report would be of immense benefit to careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), helping to highlight and promote excellent provision, good professional practice and examples of how best to assure impartiality (para. 3.24). It was argued that ‘professionals working in institutions providing high quality CEIAG could then offer peer-to-peer support, to spread innovative, dynamic and excellent CEIAG throughout the system’ (Op. Cit). Since then, radical changes have taken place with a plethora of new players and differing ‘careers and/or employability offerings’ emerging in schools, colleges and universities. The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2013)<sup>20</sup> also provides helpful practical insights for policy-makers to address and monitor impartial careers guidance in a lifelong learning context. I am confident the Career Development Institute (CDI), a new UK-wide careers professional body, will be working alongside its strategic partners at a regional and national level to assess progress in this regard.

### **How will the Council relate to the new Career Development Institute?**

The Council has monitored closely the transformation of four professional associations from public, private and voluntary/community sectors into a new unified professional body. This is a major achievement, given the history and heritage that underpinned each of their organisations’ work. The new Career Development Institute (CDI)<sup>21</sup> should perform a key role in driving

forward exemplars in the design and delivery of high quality professional career development services. Karen O’ Donoghue, the newly appointed CDI President and Chair,<sup>22</sup> states this: ‘must be a game changer for the profession’. I think she’s absolutely right in her assertion that the CDI must now focus on building its credibility, viability and voice. It’s a new beginning and there’s significant potential for the CDI to articulate: how it can potentially further develop the National Occupations Standards for career development; how it plans to strengthen and build a UK-wide career progression framework for those entering and those within the careers industry; and most importantly, to outline its relationship with higher education and employers. With regards to the latter, these areas have largely been in decline in recent years and my own view is this must change rapidly. The extent to which the CDI succeeds in its ambitions will ultimately be determined by its members and affiliates.

The Coalition Government set a vision for the NCS workforce that by April 2015, 50% of its careers advisers will be registered as a career development professional with the CDI, for which they have to be qualified to NVQ level 6. The remainder will have to have a minimum qualification at level 3, recognising the new professional framework and career progression routes that the CDI have set out. Those working in the higher education sector perform a pivotal role in helping to strengthen career development policies and practices.

We are moving into a new era that places greater emphasis on ‘trusted information’ that helps make learning provision relevant to the world of work, helps employers to recruit the right people and helps individuals to make informed career decisions. This means looking beyond where we are currently in terms of providing online and face-to-face careers services in silo areas and finding effective ways of developing a national all-age careers service that has greater relevance and impact at a local level.

**For more information about the work of the National Careers Council for England go to:**  
<https://www.gov.uk/the-national-careers-council>

**To find out more about Dr Deirdre Hughes work go to the DMH Associates webpage:**  
<http://deidrehughes.org/> or contact her by email [deidre.hughes3@btinternet.com](mailto:deidre.hughes3@btinternet.com)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/CPTF%20-%20External%20Report.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/elgpn/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cparegister.org/>

<sup>22</sup> President and Chairs’ acceptance speech at the CDI first Annual General Meeting held on 25/3/13 at NCVO, All Saints Street. London.