

APPG for Education Inquiry Call for Evidence: Do schools prepare young people for their future careers?

Submission of evidence by the National Foundation for Educational Research: June 2016

Introduction

1. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to this inquiry. We are pleased to contribute to thinking in this priority policy area which seeks to enable and support young people to make effective career decisions and successful transitions from education to employment. In addressing two of the questions listed in the Call for Evidence, this submission draws on available evidence including key publications from NFER's [Education-to-Employment research portfolio](#).

Q1. What should our schools be focusing on in order to prepare young people for the future?

2. We consider that schools should focus on equipping young people with a range of attributes, knowledge and skills which enables them to function effectively at work and more generally in their adult life. We maintain that offering high-quality career education and guidance, developing teachers' expertise to assist young people's career decision making, and updating parents and carers on career options, are essential for helping young people to prepare for their future careers. We present details of each of these activities below.

High-quality career education which gives young people the skills and tools to make informed decisions

3. In NFER's Thinkpiece: ['Careers guidance: If not an annual careers plan- then what?'](#) (McCrone, 2013), we call for a culture change in careers provision. Part of that culture change is the need to have a coherent strategy, starting with sound careers education and the development of career exploration skills. This provides a foundation on which careers advice and guidance can build. Young people need to develop their self-awareness (strengths and weaknesses and preferred learning styles), decision-making skills and broader awareness of the world of work *before* they receive careers guidance. We believe where young people have been supported, through careers education, at an earlier stage of their education, they are better equipped subsequently to make use of careers information, advice and guidance. For example, evidence from the [NFER Key Stage 2 career-related learning pathfinder evaluation](#) shows that where pupils in Year 6 were made more aware of the world of work they developed an increased understanding of the link between education, qualifications and careers and had a more positive attitude towards school and education (Wade *et al.*, 2011).
4. We conducted [a review of career professionals' involvement with schools in the UK](#) which showed that there are three main ingredients of high-quality careers education

and guidance: collaborative working; personalised support; and appropriate programmes. The evidence suggests that successful career education programmes are those that are well structured, integrated into the curriculum, and supported at a strategic level by senior management teams (McCrone and Filmer-Sankey, 2012).

5. The principles of effective careers education, information, advice and guidance are presented in a [good practice guide](#) published by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), NFER and the 157 Group of Colleges (2014). This also provides an audit to establish priorities; suggests methods and tools for implementation of plans; and suggests ways to review and evaluate progress.

High-quality career advice and guidance which gives young people access to information on all education and training routes and providers, and employment opportunities

6. High-quality guidance provides comprehensive up-to-date information and advice on career options. It is increasingly important, given the complex decision-making context facing young people, which includes the diversification of education and training opportunities and the changing labour market where more employers are demanding skills such as the ability to apply knowledge and analyse data.
7. A key consideration, for each individual young person thinking about which career option to take, is which route is best for them. Essentially, they are making a high-stakes investment decision about their future. To make an informed decision, they require information on all available opportunities, including vocational, academic and combined vocational and academic options.
8. A second aspect of high-quality career guidance is that advice is tailored to meet individuals' needs. NFER's summary of evidence on support for young people making informed decisions and choices in [a widening 14-19 landscape](#) noted that young people make decisions in different ways and at different paces and need time to assimilate careers information and what it means for them in terms of their subject choices (Marson-Smith *et al.*, 2009).
9. A third aspect of high-quality career advice is the provision of independent and impartial guidance which is designed to meet young people's needs rather than institutions' vested interests. Research has shown that career guidance provided in schools is not always impartial. For example, NFER's publication: ['How do young people make choices at age 14 and age 16?'](#) reported evidence which showed that teachers in schools for 11-18 year olds sometimes lacked impartiality by encouraging students to stay at their school sixth forms (Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2006).
10. Young people need to receive high-quality, comprehensive and unbiased career advice and guidance. Ofsted's [survey](#) (2013) found that career provision in schools was not working well enough with only one in five schools offering the quality of career advice and guidance at a good level. The report highlighted the importance of providing

information on the full range of career pathways and declared that schools provided unbalanced career guidance which favours access to university: 'Vocational training and apprenticeships were rarely promoted effectively, especially in schools with sixth forms. The A-level route to universities remained the 'gold standard' for young people, their parents and teachers'. A recent [report](#) by the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility quoted NFER evidence which suggests that: '... attitudes to vocational education have not kept up with the pace of structural change, it remains the poor relation of academic attainment.' (GB. Parliament. HoL. Select Committee on Social Mobility, 2016).

11. Schools should embrace accountability for preparing their young people for the future. The House of Commons Education Committee's [inquiry](#) concluded that schools must be 'held accountable for the provision of high quality, focused careers guidance required by all their students to help them meet the challenges of today's world of work'. (GB. Parliament. House of Commons Education Committee, 2013).
12. [A survey](#) by the CBI (2014) found that 80 per cent of businesses across the UK 'feel the quality of careers advice young people receive is not good enough to help them make informed decisions about future career options'. [Cappon \(2015\)](#) drew attention to the importance of advice not just for making short-term decisions about which courses or qualifications to take but for longer-term career planning: 'In countries like England, in which there appears to be serious mismatching between acquired skills and their deployment at work, career guidance matters more ... employability is improved when learners are enabled to develop the planning skills that can assist in an understanding of career management'.
13. A fourth aspect of high-quality career guidance is helping young people to develop an understanding of the world of work and employability skills. [The CBI/Pearson education and skills survey](#) (CBI, 2015) reported that half of the employers surveyed in the UK considered that a top priority for schools and colleges should be developing young people's awareness of working life with support from businesses. World-of-work related learning can include problem-solving activities, work experience, work shadowing, employer visits, career talks, CV development and mock interviews. NFER research by Sims *et al.*, (2013) found that work experience had helped to make young people more work-ready. This [evaluation of the work experience placement trials](#), noted that placements enabled young people to develop an understanding of employer expectations (time management, dress code, behaviour), had enhanced their confidence and had helped to develop their teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills. [Research](#) by Kashefpakdel and Percy (2016), using British Cohort Study data, found that higher levels of employer contacts, in the form of career talks with outside speakers, were correlated to better labour market outcomes, as measured by earnings, at age 26.
14. We maintain that schools should make the most of opportunities to engage with employers through their own contacts as well as through national links brokered by the Careers and Enterprise Company, and networks such as *Inspiring the Future*, which

offers volunteers from all sectors and professions to talk about their jobs and sectors, and *Speakers for Schools*, which offers talks by representatives from industry, business, the public sector and academia.

15. [Research](#) by Carberry *et al.*, (2015) identified a range of employability skills which businesses look for when recruiting. These workplace functional skills included a positive attitude and willingness to work, interpersonal and teamwork skills, problem-solving skills, a desire for responsibility: ‘... it has become essential that young people can demonstrate that they not only possess knowledge demanded by employers, but that they can *apply* that knowledge in different and unfamiliar circumstances’. The [CBI/Pearson education and skills survey](#) (CBI, 2015) found that not only do employers want literate and numerate recruits, there is also a growing demand for knowledge and skills in information technology; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); management; and leadership.

Professional development of teachers so that they have knowledge, understanding and expertise to assist young people’s career decision making

16. Professional development for teachers on how to signpost the young towards appropriate sources of information and advise them about the issues to consider in making career decisions is critical. Yet, there is evidence that some teachers lack awareness and understanding of what different options offer in terms of training, career development and remuneration. Around four-fifths of the teachers [surveyed](#) by AllAboutSchoolLeavers (2015) said that they wished they knew more about the options available: ‘Teachers want and need to know more about all school and college leaver options, not just university’. Young people [surveyed](#) by Youth Employment UK (2015) said that their schools had given them more advice about university courses than other options. [Research](#) by the Boston Consulting Group (2013) (presented as part of the Higher Ambitions Summit) reported that 80 per cent of teachers surveyed claimed they do not have enough knowledge to give advice and about half admitted they have given poor advice. A [survey](#) by UNISON found that the majority of schools ‘had reduced their careers advice and many rely on overworked teachers to provide it, rather than careers experts’ (UNISON, 2013). We suggest that the quality of careers guidance would improve if teachers systematically received professional development in this area.
17. Evidence from the Sutton Trust’s [Higher ambitions summit](#) highlights the importance of keeping teachers informed about the current routes to careers (Nash, 2014). The report drew on data from the NFER Teacher Voice panel which indicated that 65 per cent of teachers said they would rarely or never advise a student to take an apprenticeship if the student had the grades to attend university. An [NFER paper](#) argues that we need to address entrenched views that academic routes are in some way ‘better’ (McCrone, 2014). The paper asserts that all teachers need to be better equipped with a basic knowledge of the ranges of options open to young people and where to direct them for impartial information and suggests this should be part of teachers’ professional standards.

18. The OECD's Director for Education and Skills [considers](#) that teachers would benefit from a broader exposure to the world of work:

We also need to think about the labour market knowledge of teachers: continuous professional development should involve spending time in enterprises so that teachers have a better understanding on the evolution of the labour market and workplace ...

(Carberry *et al.*, 2015)

Keeping parents and carers updated on all education and training routes and providers and employment opportunities so that they can provide informed support to their children

19. Parents and carers are important stakeholders to consider because they are influential in the discussions their children have with them about careers. [A study](#) by the Association of Colleges (AoC) in partnership with the Skills Show reported that 70 per cent of young people turn to parents for careers advice (Freshminds, 2014). We suggest that schools should use their established partnership with parents and carers to keep them updated on the current knowledge and skills required in the workplace and the routes – technical and professional and/or academic - their children can take to acquire them. This enables parents and carers to provide their children with informed support during career decision-making dialogues.
20. [Research](#) indicates that although most young people talk through their post-school options with their families (Marson-Smith *et al.*, 2009), family members often do not know enough about the various options to offer informed opinions and advice. For example, [AllAboutSchoolLeavers \(2015\)](#) concluded from their survey of parents and carers that 'there is a significant knowledge gap' regarding non-university options such as apprenticeships. Similarly, [evidence](#) from the Edge Foundation (2014) noted that many young people are reportedly being actively discouraged from opting for vocational education.
21. This evidence suggests that more weight should be placed on informing parents and carers about the current diverse routes to careers so that they can support their children's decision making in a more informed and useful way.

Q5. To help the APPG create a practical set of approaches and recommendations:

5.1 What examples are there of schools and colleges preparing young people well for the workforce?

22. The NFER carried out [case-study research](#) for the DfE to identify and examine effective work experience as part of study programmes (McCrone *et al.*, 2015a). The six case studies summarised in this report highlight different aspects of effective work experience and how the schools and colleges have developed approaches to improve young people's employability skills and prepare them for the workforce.

23. Birmingham Metropolitan College launched its Professional Services Academy (PSA) in 2014. The PSA was developed in response to local research into the needs of employers and highlighted a *'skills crisis in the Professional Services Industry'*.
24. Working in partnership with leading firms from the financial, legal, accounting and business community, the PSA is the *'first of its kind in the country'*. It is open to students studying AS/A Levels in law, accounting, economics, business studies and mathematics and those on apprenticeships in accounting, business administration and legal studies.
25. At Pimlico Academy experience of the world of work forms an integral part of their strategy for preparing young people for the workforce. Relationships with employers are well-developed so that the school is confident that the employers (providing experience of the world of work) are ready for the young people and have a programme of activity lined up for them. *'Smart matching'* between the young person and the placement is vital in terms of, for example, the interests of the young person and the skills targeted for development (such as hard knowledge-based skills or softer employability skills). Ensuring that the young people have the right *'mindset'* is important:

They need to be active rather than passive. They need to ask questions. They need to be inquisitive. They need to think about how they present themselves. They need to consider: What can I learn and what do I want to learn from this experience? We also work hard to encourage them to reflect about their experience and what they have learnt.

(McCrone *et al.*, 2015a)

26. [Top tips for senior leaders in schools and colleges](#) (NERF, 2015) provide practical approaches and recommendations. The top tips identify some ideas that have been tried and tested and recommends techniques to develop relationships between employers and education providers.
27. The NFER, South East Strategic Leaders, London Councils and the London Enterprise Panel carried out research: [Improving employability skills, enriching our economy: case study report](#) in 2015. This explored how secondary schools, colleges, SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and micro-businesses in London and the South East work together to improve young people's employability skills and successful transition into work.
28. Barking and Dagenham College works with local employers and community stakeholders to provide employment opportunities for students. One example included a decorating project which was part of the college's Aspire programme where companies within each curriculum area address the issue that not all young people have the opportunity to gain experience of work while studying. Thames View Primary School approached the college for a cost effective solution to redecorating their school building. K & M McLoughlin Decorating Ltd already had a positive relationship with the college's Business Engagement Manager who brought them in as a commercial partner to bid for the project. With support from K & M, the students bid for and won the contract to

redecorate the school over a five-week period. K & M held the contract, supplied resources and provided overall project management. Two students went on to become K & M apprentices.

29. Newlands Girls' School (NGS) is a secondary comprehensive school that encourages and inspires pupils through a comprehensive programme of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG). Developing employability skills permeates the school's leadership and governance, curriculum and the skills and knowledge that pupils acquire throughout their education. NGS is passionate about embedding employability throughout the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities, involving employers of all sizes across subjects and year groups. Examples include: firstly, a local handmade cake company that opened its doors to pupils showing how they have grown from the kitchen of one lady to a company of 140 employees, producing and delivering handmade cakes to businesses across Europe and the Middle East. Secondly, Year 11 students visit a local SME that specialises in printing to learn about lithographic and digital printing processes and what it means to run a small business.
30. More examples of how schools and colleges are preparing young people well for the workforce are in the [report](#) that contains the case studies from the research, and should be read alongside the [summary report](#) which contains the research findings. NFER also produced a '[connect card](#)' designed to help education organisations and businesses to engage with each other more effectively and stimulate discussion (NFER 2015a, NFER 2015b and NFER 2015c).
31. Details of other relevant research carried out by NFER includes:
 - a [rapid literature review](#) (McCrone *et al.*, 2015b) to identify the key characteristics and essential elements of teaching and learning in technical and vocational education. The review found that technical education is not generally defined as a separate entity as distinct from vocational education. The evidence highlights that the characteristics of vocational education include not only those associated with all learning (such as supportive teacher/learner relationships and having a culture of aspiration), but also the distinctive, additional features of meeting the diversity of vocational learners' needs and contextualisation of learning. Contextualisation includes the importance of relevance to the workplace sector, access to industry-standard facilities and resources, drawing on teachers' dual professionalism, teachers place in a community of practice, links with employers and the sequencing of experiences.

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