

# When IAG grow up...

**A collection of opinions on the state of careers information, advice and guidance in the UK.**

# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>IAG: an FE student officer perspective</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>IS IAG a barrier to participation in Further Education?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Careers Guidance: Guaranteed</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>High Quality Information, Advice and Guidance needs to start in School</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>One simple idea for IAG in schools that could change everything</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Raising the student voice for jobs now and in the future</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Careers Information, Advice and Guidance Matters</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CEIAG: Moving beyond the 'sticking plaster' approach</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Preparing young people for the world of work</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Careers: a little bit of advice</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The role of information, advice and guidance in improving life chances</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Employability and engagement key to graduate success</b>	<b>20</b>

---

One of the biggest decisions a young person will ever make is choosing the right path to take so they can achieve the career they want.

For many young people though, they are left to navigate the complicated world of qualifications, providers, further study or work options either alone or with minimal support.

Face to face information, advice and guidance is disparate and patchy from town to town with many having to rely on a 'one size fits all' website or outdated and sometimes biased advice from parents and teachers.

It's clear that IAG needs a radical overhaul so it can start supporting the learner, and ultimately society, more effectively. This collection of thoughts and ideas aim to start the conversation.

**Joe Vinson, Vice President Further Education, NUS**

# IAG: an FE student officer perspective

Information Advice and Guidance in both schools and colleges is unacceptable and inefficient. Much of this stems from the current source of careers advice. Too often it is teachers who are acting as careers advisers. Whilst it is useful to gain the perspective of these people, their opinions are often influenced by their personal biases. Teachers or lecturers have often been through a more 'traditional', for the most part academic, system of education and are not the best placed to give well informed advice on options such as apprenticeships or vocational courses.

The result of this over reliance on teachers means that students can be pushed in to courses which they are not well suited to or are likely to stick at. Because of this there is a desperate need for an independent body which can offer impartial advice and has a broad knowledge of all the options available to young people.

Currently the National Careers Service fails to fill this gap. Students need face to face advice in their school or college, not a website or an advice line. Help once a student has left school or college is also not good enough. The job centre forces young people to take low skilled work, instead of advising on options to gain access to more training. This increases the likelihood that a young person will become a NEET.

Many students also speak about the problem of the relationship between schools and colleges. There seems to be a stigma attached to colleges and an element of competition between schools and colleges. Too often the messaging from schools is that if 'you're smart you stay in school and if you're stupid you go to college'. This results in students staying at school to do courses which are completely unsuitable and take them on an inappropriate career path. Instead of schools and colleges competing against each other, there needs to

be cooperation on IAG to ensure the right outcome for the student rather than the institution.

Effective IAG must begin long before the age of 15 or 16. It needs to be an on-going conversation throughout school. This means starting at Primary School with conversations about careers incorporated in to learning. Teenagers are more likely to say they want to be a footballer than a sports physiotherapist but young people need to learn how they can transfer their skills and interests across different types of careers. They also need to be exposed to a range of role models and not just signposted towards the traditional career paths such as Doctor or Lawyer.

As the Further Education zone committee we passionately believe that young people are being failed by the current level of IAG in both schools and colleges. In a society where there is so much pressure to get a job, the support to do so needs to be radically reformed.

**Too often the messaging from schools is that if 'you're smart you stay in school and if you're stupid you go to college'.**

**NUS' FE Zone Committee consists of nine student officers from across England with responsibility for planning and delivering the work of each policy zone within NUS.**

“68 per cent of students think that 16 is too early to be making choices which will define their future career path”

**NUS research on A level subject choices, 2014**

# Is IAG a barrier to participation in Further Education?

Last year NIACE called on the government to maintain real terms spending on information, advice and guidance (IAG)<sup>1</sup>. Things are in a parlous state. We need the proper strategy we were promised – not the one that’s lost somewhere on the web. Without good IAG people waste time and money.

Some students get poor careers education at school which is not impartial or independent. The careers education they need should be based on listening to what they are interested in doing or being. It shouldn’t start by telling them where to go or rubbishing their ideas. It shouldn’t assume that good passes in GCSE automatically means they should do A levels, or that good passes at A level means they should go to university. It should encourage students to explore ideas and opportunities; it should be based on what the student wants and says. I recently met a group of angry business students who all said they had wasted a year staying on at school to do A levels: they were now all doing well in a vocational level 3 qualification at an FE college.

Those who don’t do well at school are often directed to an FE college but arrive for an interview to find they don’t know much about what the college offers. Sometimes they don’t have the entry requirements and then it’s too late to get these, which means they start in FE at a much lower level than expected. Ofsted says that colleges ‘often lack basic information about these learners and so are unable to

target additional support appropriately<sup>2</sup>. This is careless and wastes learners’ time.

Many schools are unclear about what’s involved in an apprenticeship. Students may be unaware of entry requirements; unclear that an apprenticeship is a job. Once students make an application and undergo an assessment they find out - but wouldn’t it be better if they could plan ahead?

In some schools only the ‘vocational’ or ‘undecided’ students are referred for IAG – everyone else has received their guidance from the school. I hear of certain career options or university never being suggested to some disadvantaged young people. It is the law that young people receive good careers education from years 8 to 13. It is still not good enough in enough schools.

Finally, the National Careers Service is mainly telephone or web-based, and the advertising is poor. Now that those studying at level 3 or above are taking out loans we need better advice on how they might do this. This is particularly so for adults over the age of 24. Colleges can give advice on courses and finance, like the 24+ loans bursary, but they cannot give advice on whether a loan should be taken out in the first place.

What we need is good careers education early enough to make a difference. We need independent and well-informed IAG in schools. We need help for IAG staff in colleges to use their skills across neighbouring institutions. It needs sorting.

**Dr Peter Lavender, Chair of Interim Leadership Team, National Society of Apprentices**

<sup>1</sup> NIACE: The case for investment in learning for adults: A contribution to 2013 Spending Review by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), May 2013

<sup>2</sup> The report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills: Further education and skills (Ofsted, 2012/13) para 22

# Careers Guidance: Guaranteed

Think back to when you were at primary school. When you were asked 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' your answer probably wasn't what you're interested in now.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) latest research, funded by the Skills Show and carried out by FreshMinds, shows little has changed. The majority of children (aged 11 to 16) expressed a desire to become doctors, teachers or to work in the uniformed services (police, fire service, armed forces etc). The jobs they wanted to do were categorised according to gender, with girls wanting to become teachers and doctors and boys wanting to do hands on, practical jobs like engineering and plumbing. Only 5 per cent of the jobs young people said they wanted to do would not have been around in 1984, a whole generation ago, and all of these were related to IT.

Alongside this, and very much linked, is the fact that parents and teachers are the key influencers on their career choices; 70 per cent turn to parents and 57 per cent ask teachers. Children can't be expected to know what jobs will be available by the time they leave school, college or university. But parents and teachers say they have no idea<sup>3</sup> of the range of jobs that are available now either, but as they're such a key influence on young people we need *them* to be better informed and up-to-date with what is available.

So why is this important now? Given the level of youth unemployment and young people who are not in any form of education or training, along with raising the age you are required to stay in education or training to 18, it is more important than ever that you are made aware

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/newsroom/aoc\\_news\\_releases.cfm/id/F0680F00-88BD-4F9A-937E6FC2EE0B1630/page/27](http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/newsroom/aoc_news_releases.cfm/id/F0680F00-88BD-4F9A-937E6FC2EE0B1630/page/27)

at an early stage of the different routes that are available to you – whether academic or vocational.

You need to know that apprenticeships are not only an option for boys involving working in a dirty environment with a spanner; they are a route for girls as well and can be in aerospace, nuclear energy and advanced manufacturing. These are all jobs of today and tomorrow, well paid with clear progression and all in clean, hi-tech environments. Too often, young people leave school with little knowledge about vocational courses, apprenticeships and things that can be studied that aren't A-Levels.

This is what AoC's *Careers Guidance: Guaranteed* campaign seeks to change. We are calling on the Government to ensure that all young people have access to careers advice on education, employment and training options. The easiest way to show your support for the campaign is by signing our online petition. We are asking the Government to fund the careers service properly and tell Ofsted to report on careers advice at every inspection, plus employers, local enterprise partnerships, councils and education need to create a careers hub in every community.

These measures won't solve all the problems, and the issues you face as young people won't disappear overnight, but they'd be a start.

**The Association of Colleges (AoC) exists to represent and promote the interests of Colleges and provide members with professional support services.**

[www.aoc.co.uk/en/parliament-and-campaigns/campaigns/careers-guidance-guaranteed](http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/parliament-and-campaigns/campaigns/careers-guidance-guaranteed)

“Parents and teachers are the key influencers on their career choices; 70 per cent turn to parents and 57 per cent ask teachers”

**Careers Guidance: Guaranteed, AoC report**

# High Quality Information, Advice and Guidance needs to start in School.

It's sobering to consider a student graduating this year is likely to still be in the workplace in 2058 and possibly beyond. This presents a real conundrum for both policy makers and politicians to solve. Do students know enough about the current jobs market to establish and flourish in their chosen careers? And once employed, how will the qualifications, skills and experiences they've acquired during their formal education prepare them for a working life likely to span over half a century and witness tremendous economic and technological changes.

Pearson's view on IAG is clear. With the quality and availability of careers advice having a huge impact on the choices young people make about their futures, it can't afford to be anything less than excellent. Similarly, it can't start too soon or finish too late. Choices made early on in school life, like which qualifications to study, have an impact on later choices and paths people take.

There is a mounting body of evidence which suggests the situation in schools around career guidance is getting worse. Since the introduction of the new statutory duty on schools to deliver independent careers advice, many teachers have reported not having the right expertise or resource to adequately address this. A Pearson commissioned YouGov poll revealed that only a third of teachers surveyed were confident their school is fulfilling

their statutory duty and this is despite 90 per cent of teachers thinking high quality independent careers guidance at school is important.

The Government is right to be focusing on making sure young people have the information they need to make the right choices. Creating one UCAS style, centralised information and application system for all career options through HE, FE or the world of work could help school leavers make better informed choices, but even then more needs to be done to drive a step change in schools. Pearson research found that over a third of school children used television for inspiration and information about future careers. You might think that's fine when supported by other forms of IAG if it's a BBC Natural History Documentary they are watching, but less keen if it's something like Celebrity Big Brother!

If children are hungry for advice and inspiration from a young age doesn't that tell us something? If children are getting advice and inspiration from television we need to embrace this appetite they have and support them more at school so they have the best chance of making the right choices. We need to make sure the choices young people make are realistic, based on the best market intelligence and allow them to succeed in their chosen careers. Even with the best qualifications we know many young people struggle to find work when they first enter the jobs market.

## If children are hungry for advice and inspiration from a young age doesn't that tell us something?

Technology should be a much bigger part of the solution. Like the increasingly popular social media platforms like LinkedIn, young people could, in the appropriate setting explore what skills and qualifications are needed to secure

roles in the real world and to discover the full breadth of options out there.

Pearson has launched a new digital service called *Think Future* which provides diagnostic tools for pupils to think through different career choices and how their current strengths and weakness compare and where more focus might be needed to bridge any gaps. Behind this technology of course are people and individuals personal stories on how and why they chose to pursue different opportunities in life. More people, including the UK's growing

body of university and college leavers need to play an active role in helping current students navigate their way to a successful and fulfilling career and Pearson would certainly be keen to help play a part in making this happen.

**David Phillips, Vice President,  
Work Based Learning and  
Colleges, Pearson UK**

# One simple idea for IAG in schools that could change everything

There's a business truism that claims that "what is measured is managed". It's nonsense. Or rather, if it's not nonsense then it leaves out so much essential detail that it might as well be gibberish. You see the key to understanding what makes this nonsense is that there are so many terrible, terrible forms of measurement. Take weight: there's long been a tradition of weighing someone to establish how healthy they are, or how much weight they've lost and therefore how healthy they are. But weight is just one part of a definition of health and as a measurement it's really, almost pointlessly simple.

The same trouble exists with Information Advice and Guidance in schools. Anyone who has kept an eye on the topic over the last few years will know that almost more than any other topic you care to mention IAG has been given the run-around by a succession of Governments who seem to all agree that something is not quite working, but they're not quite sure what to do about it. Currently, the excellent National Careers Service does a good job of providing a central point of contact for those with IAG questions, but the provision of IAG in schools is erratic.

This is where we come to the issue of measurements. Currently, in schools the measurement of a school's success is attained by its grades. Schools have streamlined themselves to become factories to churn out as many passing grades as they can. Often in school literature the percentage of students who go on to university will be the next most-prized statistic. This becomes the benchmark

by which all the schools are compared. In this modern age when getting a degree can cost you over £50k which seriously dents the long-term earning benefits of having a degree - university should not be used as a benchmark for anything. It runs a terrible risk of pushing young people towards a destination that might not be right for them and could leave them in a parlous financial state for decades to come.

So what measurement should be used to prove the effectiveness of IAG and a school? How about happiness? Now - don't laugh. Yes, on first inspection it may seem a bit hippyish, but happiness is increasingly being used as a metric - even the United Nations recently published a World Happiness Report and large companies such as BT are factoring in how happy staff are as a measurement of success. So why not schools? Wouldn't you like to know which schools produce the (long-term) happiest students? Wouldn't that be a measurement to encourage an IAG landscape where all opportunities were pushed based on what would be most likely to make a student happy in the long term? Or do we fear a situation where disgruntled graduates answer their school's longitudinal happiness survey and prove that actually happiness doesn't start with a BA?

**[www.notgoingtouni.co.uk](http://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk) helps students make informed decisions about their future by showing the opportunities that exist outside of the traditional University route**

# Raising the student voice for jobs now and for the future

The new 'Hidden Talent' report by the Local Government Association shows that of the 2.5 million young people struggling to find enough work across England and Wales, only 340,000 are likely to find more work over the next four years, leaving 2.12 million still unemployed or underemployed. Although the latest figures show that youth unemployment (ages 16-24) is going down, the true scale of youth unemployment is hidden as many young people are only working part-time or are over-qualified for their current job. Some 425,000 are not working to their potential, for example graduates working in non-graduate jobs. This everyday reality offers both a challenge and an opportunity to today's student leaders. We suggest the NUS has a crucial role alongside professional careers advisers, teachers and employers to help students today understand that:

- There is a serious mismatch between the needs of employers and the expectations of young people. Many students want jobs in occupations where there are simply not enough jobs. By contrast, do they know there are many jobs in the Science, Technology and Engineering sectors - upwards of 100,000 professional scientists, engineers and technologists will be needed in the UK every year over the next decade.
- Employers value work experience and mention it as one of the most important requirements when employing young people. Employers value part-time work, work placements as part of their studies, involvement in student societies, the students' union and sports to develop the employability skills they look for.
- Increasingly employers are recruiting globally. This means that British students are

not just competing with their fellow classmates for jobs: they are competing with students from across the world. British students should get work or study abroad as part of their studies to gain the skills they need to compete globally for jobs.

## Jobs for future generations

Students today also have a responsibility to the students of the future to help them make informed choices about their futures. They need your voice through NUS to get careers support for young people right. The Careers Alliance has made a call for collaborative action to challenge the Coalition Government's current careers policy which has seen:

- Connexions closed and funding for careers education and guidance in schools removed.
- Funding for AimHigher and Education Business Partnerships removed.
- Schools assigned a new statutory duty to secure independent careers support for their students without any funding or proper guidance on how to do this.
- Government policy statements set up an unhelpful dichotomy between the career support provided by careers advisers and the career learning opportunities provided by interactions with employers.

Today's student leadership has the opportunity to use its voice to secure better jobs for today's students, but also influence how tomorrow's students are prepared for the jobs of the future. In particular, we invite NUS to support the Careers Alliance campaign to ensure that young people have access to high-quality careers education and guidance at all stages of education, and encourage more employers to offer young people opportunities to learn about the world of work during their studies.

**Dame Ruth Silver**  
**Chair, Careers Sector**  
**Stakeholders Alliance and**  
**Keith Herrmann**  
**Convenor, Careers Sector**  
**Stakeholders Alliance**

# Careers Information, Advice and Guidance Matters

The provision of high quality careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) has never been more important than it is today.

Students at school, college and university should have access to impartial and independent support to enable them to make informed learning and career choices. Access should be extended to adults in the workforce too.

We live in an age of constant change. Many of those entering the world of work in 2014 will not retire until at least 2064. Many of today's jobs and skills will disappear to be replaced by new careers that we know little or nothing about now. Individual circumstances also change. It will be commonplace for people to have three or more careers (not jobs) in their lifetime.

To help individuals make the most of their talents and satisfy their aspirations, and to bring about sustainable economic growth in the UK, an all age universal service, geared towards those most in need, is essential.

**We live in an age of constant change. Many of those entering the world of work in 2014 will not retire until at least 2064.**

It's frustrating that our political leaders don't see the real value of CIAG. It has, sadly, always been thus. Today the credibility gap appears to be as wide as ever despite employer bodies consistently calling for improvements in careers provision. When our political leaders 'big up' the importance of social mobility why can't they see its link with opportunity awareness; or the connection between supportive advice and guidance and raising aspirations?

Employability of students graduating into the workforce is deemed a high priority yet to be truly effective it has to be supported by CIAG.

Individuals seeking careers information or advice should ensure that those giving them support are well informed and don't have vested interests.

There are numerous cornerstones to effective CIAG. First and foremost it should be accessible when and where it is required by those seeking it. Information can easily be made available 24/7 through the use of technology as can some advice but guidance is most effective when delivered face to face.

CIAG must be delivered in an impartial and independent way – what practitioners call a 'client centred' approach. Careers information must be accurate and relevant; advice must be informed and 'client centred'. Teachers, parents and employers have a part to play in providing careers information and advice but careers guidance must be left to qualified practitioners.

Within educational establishments, clear referral systems should be in place to ensure that students are referred on to an appropriate agency or expert. This is where CIAG often comes unstuck. Too many learners miss out because they are not properly referred to a relevant agency or practitioner.

There's an urgent need to raise aspiration levels. The best way to help people to aspire is by inspiring them. Careers advisers should aim to inspire their clients by the way they interact with them.

Of course there are resource implications in what I am suggesting. Difficult decisions have

to be made as to where to allocate scarce funding but much of the investment in education and training will be wasted if learners are not given the right support and direction.

Dropout from courses, apprenticeships and jobs is not just a waste of human resource – it is also a chronic waste of money.

**Carl Gilleard OBE**

“I think it is very difficult to know exactly what is the right choice at a young age and the advice from teachers is not necessarily the best advice. Properly trained independent careers advisors are a valuable asset to the process.”

**Survey respondent, NUS research on A level subject choices, 2014**

# CEIAG: Moving beyond the 'sticking plaster' approach

Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is seen across the political spectrum as *the* answer to getting young people onto the right post-16 course and gaining the kind of knowledge and skills that employers say they want. We agree that high quality CEIAG is part of the answer, but not if it is used as a 'sticking plaster' to cover a complex and competitive education and training system. On its own it is not equal to this task.

For example, there are strong funding incentives for schools to entice young people to stay on to take A Levels in their sixth forms, whether or not this is in the best interests of their learners. While this is the right option for some, for others it can lead to failure or unacceptably low grades at AS, dropping a subject/subjects, repeating learning, moving to another course/institution having effectively wasted a year, or dropping out altogether<sup>4</sup>. This is not only financially unacceptable in a time of austerity, but also devastating for those involved. CEIAG cannot overcome the effects of a divided education system where the academic track is seen as high status and institutions compete for 16-19 year olds.

In our view ensuring that all young people are offered the opportunity to succeed and progress in upper secondary (14-19) education in an era of Raising of the

<sup>4</sup> See Hodgson and Spours (2014) *What is happening with 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London? Report 2: Risk factors and strategies to support students in schools*. London: IOE/London Councils.

Participation Age (RPA), requires something stronger and more radical than simply improving CEIAG (important though this is).

As we have argued elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, deeper reform is needed to build the universal upper secondary education system in England that would equip all 14-19 year olds to play a meaningful role in the rapidly changing economic, political and social context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We need:

- An overarching vision and set of purposes for upper secondary education that speaks to young people, their parents, educators and employers.
- A simplified and unified baccalaureate system that enhances both academic and vocational learning and facilitates synergy between them.
- A new more supportive and engaged role for employers and higher education providers that underpins a more fruitful relationship between education and working life.
- A strongly collaborative local learning system of providers that works with wider local and regional social partners to support 14+ participation, achievement and progression into employment or higher education.
- A more deliberative and democratic policy process in which national government sets the frameworks for economic action at the local and regional levels.

In a more collaborative and unified system CEIAG is no longer a sticking plaster. It can take its rightful place as an integral and constructive part of a simplified universal upper secondary education system.

**Professor Ann Hodgson and Professor Ken Spours, Institute of Education, University of London**

<sup>5</sup> Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2012) *Towards a universal upper secondary education system in England: a unified and ecosystem vision*. London: IOE Press

# Preparing young people for the world of work

UNISON is the main union for careers staff. Our members carry out vital roles in helping people enter training or the labour market. Careers workers are particularly important in helping young people get the good advice they need to make well-informed choices to enable them to progress into further learning or work.

In the current economic climate and with youth unemployment rising, an effective careers service has never been more important. Professional and tailored services are vital in improving social mobility and reducing inequality, helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds both raise their aspirations and fulfil their potential.

It greatly concerns us that schools have been given the responsibility to provide careers advice but without the funding to deliver this. As a result research conducted by Careers England has shown that 8 out of 10 schools in England have reduced their careers advice. In one case, a school switched from 65 days of careers advice a year from the old Connexions Careers service to just 16 days of bought-in services.

A UNISON survey in June 2013, on the state of the careers service in England, revealed that 54 per cent of schools had reduced their careers advice provision. School teachers do their best to support the progression of young people, but they are rarely specialists in the labour market. When teachers work with careers professionals they can deliver together effective, innovative, aspirational and creative career/learning/training opportunities.

Worryingly there is no central quality controlled or accredited register of providers for schools to procure careers services from. The previous Connexions service was condemned for being

patchy, however the new system is even more so.

The push towards a more localised careers service is yet another means for the Government to pass responsibility for tough funding decisions to under-resourced local authorities. This lack of clarity and direction by the Government has allowed some local authorities to apply and fund a very narrow interpretation of their statutory duties to the detriment of a more rounded careers service.

All young people should have face to face information, advice and guidance, especially those who have the least parental/carer support. Effective advice and guidance involves knowledge of both local and national resources that young people may need in the future. UNISON strongly believes that the only reliable, effective and accurate way to do this is face to face. It is very unlikely that most schools will have the capacity to offer this to all pupils.

A one-size-fits-all approach to careers guidance will fail to help the many young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) who face multiple barriers to employment; which can include underachievement at school, special educational needs (SEN), homelessness, caring responsibilities and disabilities. To address this, support into education, training or employment must be personalised and tailored according to specific need.

UNISON believes young people deserve a properly funded, face-to face careers programme delivered by highly qualified well resource careers Advisers. Unfortunately they are currently being short-changed by a government focused on saving money rather than tackling youth unemployment.

**UNISON, is one of the UK's largest trade unions, serving more than 1.3 million public service staff.**

"The government has underestimated the strength of opposition to their policies on the careers service. An overwhelming consensus led by UNISON and supported by key stakeholders continues to demonstrate the vital role to the economy and young people provided by good, effective, independent advice and guidance.

UNISON has campaigned consistently and vociferously to challenge the government's policies on the careers service and the professionals within it. To counter to criticism the Government continues to develop short term headline grapping initiatives with no long term coherent strategy.

Choosing which path or career to follow after school is one of the most difficult decisions in any young person's life. Indeed, it is one that often begins years before they leave. Finding a career path requires a specialist map and the careers professional advisors help young people navigate the complex choices available to them.

According to the latest unemployment figures, 900,000 young people are currently out of work, with long term unemployment sitting at 828,000 and long term youth unemployment has doubled under prime minister David Cameron.

This risks the creation of a lost generation, causing long term damage to our economy and society. A lesson learned during the 1980s is that high unemployment carries huge social cost – poorer health, higher crime and social breakdown.

Young people are walking out of school into an economy that is rife with low paid, insecure jobs. Now more than ever, quality careers guidance is essential in helping pupils to choose the right subjects and prepare for the world of work. Unless the Government invests in the careers service and provides statutory guidance, a generation of school leavers will be unprepared and ill-equipped. All young people deserve high quality, independent, impartial careers advice, but they are increasingly at the mercy of a postcode lottery."

**Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary**

# Careers: a little bit of advice

It's a mess. Anyone who thinks the current system for providing information advice and guidance (IAG) to young people is fit for purpose is either a fool or a knave.

Ask young people!! Ask Ofsted! Ask Graham Stuart MP who chairs the education Select committee!

Schools get a real hammering when it comes to advice and guidance. Research by the Sutton Trust showed that half of young people consider the advice and guidance that they received before making choices to be inadequate. Ofsted reports have highlighted that careers professionals have a low status within schools; they lack understanding of the range of options available to pupils and do not have enough time to advise them in depth.

My particular concern is the way that vocational pathways and apprenticeships in particular are simply not getting across as schools intensify their obsession with academic league tables and focus on retaining and growing their sixth forms.

School obligations are described thus: "Every school will be required to make individualised careers advice available to its pupils. The advice will be delivered by certified professionals who are well informed, benefit from continued training and professional development and whose status in schools is respected and valued."

What evidence do we have that this is happening? I have direct experience of what is happening across a range of schools and it isn't pretty. From selective grammar schools, academies and "standard" comprehensives I have engaged with young peoples' experience of careers guidance, and too often it either isn't happening, or it's done badly.

Providing students with clearer information about employment outcomes will close the gap between the skills taught by the education system and what employers need. Like it or not, education, employability and the needs of employers need to be synchronised -- as happens in Germany, and even in isolated cases in England – three cheers for the JBC Academy, where academic and vocation skills blend seamlessly to great effect.

In the meantime, I also see some rather questionable operators seeking a commercial opportunity by offering IAG services into schools.

It is time that the post-16 sector worked together to provide an advisory and guidance service that ensures that young people hear the message about quality vocational pathways.

And if they can't talk to the schools, they should talk over the schools direct to young people, using social media and all the other communications platforms that, for example, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) seems incapable of exploiting.

We know that talking directly to young people works if you use their channels and their language.

A sequential combination of online information, moderated guidance through online careers-oriented forums, and direct one-to-one support through mentoring – online or face to face – would undoubtedly be successful.

Is anyone listening?

**Peter Cobrin, Director of Employment Pathways, a campaigning community interest company**

# The role of information, advice and guidance in improving life chances

The information, advice and guidance (IAG) model is in desperate need of an overhaul. This is important. Far from being nice rhetoric, effective IAG is ultimately about life chances. As an example there is a positive relationship between the number of employer contacts a young person has between the ages of 14 and 19 such as careers talks or work experience and their confidence whilst aged 19-24 in progression towards their career goals; the likelihood of their progression into employment, education or training; and their earnings if salaried. IAG has direct implications for education and employment and ultimately the economy.

Despite the seminal importance of IAG, whilst the government invests close to £100 billion in education, just £200 million is spent on careers education. The results of the current underfunded and fragmented system speak for themselves across a range of surveys.

- Children receiving free school meals had different expectations about what they expect to do when they leave school than children not receiving free school meals - AoC
- Three quarters of the schools visited were not implementing their duty to provide impartial careers advice effectively. Guidance for schools on careers advice is not explicit, the National Careers Service is not promoted well enough and there is a lack of employer engagement in schools - Ofsted
- Less than 9 per cent of current apprentices found out about apprenticeships from their teachers or careers advisors - Industry Apprentice Council

- Only 33 per cent of undergraduates were completely clear about what funding was available to them - NUS

Our vision of improvement in the IAG system would see:

- greater government investment
- a statutory regionalised strategy
- collaboration, delivery and accountability shared between employers, schools, colleges, adult education providers, higher education, local authorities and local enterprise partnerships
- greater civil society activity by employers - e.g. careers advice, interview practice, "this is what I do..."
- integrated student financing and financial literacy support
- multiple sources of advice for under 25 year olds, including locally available face-to-face support
- a reinvigorated role of the local authority in supporting careers advice
- an extend remit for Sector Skills Councils to include setting a sector specific careers strategy
- a review of careers education qualifications and regulations and regular continuing professional development for careers advisors

Effective IAG has a role in ensuring that outcomes are not driven by an individual's socioeconomic background. The provision of good information, advice and guidance for young people in a range of formats from a range of sources is important. Collaboration and partnership will be key and will require government investment. However, further investment and reorganisation will support the enhancement of the lives of individuals, the development of their talents and the realisation of a socially responsible, fair and prosperous society.

**The University and College Union (UCU) represents more than 120 000 academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff in FE and HE across the UK.**

# Employability and engagement key to graduate success

With almost 50 per cent of young people now going to university, the graduate employment market is becoming a crowded place. For students and graduates the picture is a lot more positive than the data portrays, but the key message is to take advantage of the help on offer at higher education careers services and, for those who are yet to enter higher education, to plan ahead.

The good news is that university offers lots of opportunities for personal development and to become more employable. Getting a degree can open up a wide range of exciting opportunities; the experience equips graduates with the skills and knowledge as well as the confidence to enter the world of work at a level of competence expected by graduate employers.

Jenny Blakesley, AGCAS Vice President and Director of Careers at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), commented:

*"Getting a university degree is not a passive process. There's a difference between acquisition of knowledge and learning to learn. What a university education teaches you is how to learn - and that makes you a flexible, desirable employee. Careers guidance and support has changed dramatically in the past ten years - there is more support than ever and more student uptake than ever - and students should make the most of the opportunities presented to them during their time at university."*

Higher education careers services are relatively well resourced and have survived the government cuts that have decimated the school sector. Employability features high on university management agendas as it contributes to the positioning of an institution in the league tables that many potential students

(and their parents) use to help them decide on a place of study. Higher education careers services remain an extremely active and innovative part of the IAG sector with a flourishing professional organisation, AGCAS, at the heart of training, research and lobbying for the sector. AGCAS is the professional body for careers and employability professionals working with higher education students and graduates and prospective entrants to higher education. AGCAS members participate in a wide range of professional activities, links between member services are strong and there is a clear commitment to the professional organisation as the voice of higher education careers professionals.

Every higher education careers service has a team of qualified and dedicated people who are specialists in helping students and graduates plan and develop their careers.

Qualified careers advisers provide the information, advice and guidance students need to plan their career and make decisions about what to do next. Employer relations teams have excellent links with local and national employers, both large organisations and, increasingly, small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), working with them to develop employability programmes and joint initiatives to improve outcomes for all stakeholders.

**Qualified careers advisers provide the information, advice and guidance students need to plan their career and make decisions about what to do next.**

Information specialists increasingly work in innovative ways with web-based material and social media platforms to ensure students and graduates have the information and labour market resources they need to make well-informed career decisions. Additionally, careers services work closely with enterprise teams to provide support for students looking at business development, freelancing and self-employment.

Student engagement with the university careers service and all that it offers will result in employers being presented with confident, capable graduates with the skills, knowledge and qualities to enable their business to grow and succeed in an increasingly competitive and global market.

There is plenty to do - the trick is getting students engaged. The first year is the new final year - the sooner students engage, the better equipped they will be as employable graduates. Higher education careers services are ready and waiting.

**Sue Spence, Careers Adviser at University of Huddersfield and The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Director for Professional Development**



Macadam House  
275 Gray's Inn Road  
London WC1X 8QB  
t 0845 5210 262  
e [nusuk@nus.org.uk](mailto:nusuk@nus.org.uk)  
**[www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk)**