

Response to the Wood Commission interim report (Part 2)

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The University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education's response to the Wood Commission interim report comes in two parts, this is Part 2.

Part 1 was written in a personal capacity by Professor David Raffe also from the Centre for Educational Sociology and was submitted earlier.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the interim findings of the *Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce*, in particular, in relation to the Commission's question '*How can young people in Scotland be supported to make the right choices to develop and support their career aspirations*'. We were unable to contribute to the consultation since our most recent research¹ on the impact of career websites compared with more 'traditional approaches' to career information, advice and guidance (CIAG) was not then completed. In addition to this research, we also draw on other research on support for young people's transitions which we have conducted in Scotland over the last 20 years.

We would be happy to provide evidence in person to the Commission.

Summary of key points

1. While careers websites such as Skills Development Scotland's My World of Work (MyWoW) are an essential part of CIAG provision, on their own they are not the most effective method of delivering CIAG to young people.
2. Young people's ability to use websites effectively for their career development is limited and they need to be supported to develop the necessary skills to do so.
3. There is now evidence from our research to assess the effectiveness of the modernisation of the careers service.
4. While feedback on careers provision from young people and parents is essential it is insufficient on its own: hard evidence is needed on whether it makes a demonstrable and positive impact on young people in practice.
5. Currently certain groups of pupils are missing out on CIAG.
6. In order to broaden and challenge stereotypical views of their possible futures, career education for Scotland's young people should begin in primary school
7. Providing a range of experiences to young people who are uncertain about their future career is unlikely to be effective without support to help them integrate the experiences into their career thinking.
8. Pupils' own paid part-time employment provides opportunities for skill development (especially employability skills) and could be drawn on by schools.

¹ Howieson C and Semple S (2013) What's the evidence? Comparing the impact of career websites and other forms of careers support. Centre for Educational Sociology: Edinburgh <http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/UNISON/FinalReport.pdf>

1. While careers websites such as Skills Development Scotland's My World of Work (MyWoW) are an essential part of CIAG provision, on their own they are not the most effective method of delivering CIAG to young people.

As the interim report acknowledges, CIAG is a key element of support for young people given the flexibility of the education and training system in Scotland. It is important that the public funding for CIAG is used in the most effective ways. Our research² shows that the most effective approaches are face to face support from careers advisers and teachers and use of the careers library. In comparison, use of MyWoW (and PlanitPlus the other main career website in Scotland) had limited impact on the development of pupils' career management skills. While career websites are an essential part of provision, our research demonstrates that on their own they are not the most effective method of delivering CIAG to young people.

2. Young people's ability to use websites effectively for their career development is limited and they need to be supported to develop the necessary skills to do so.

The Wood Commission interim report notes the use by young people of online sources of information. However, despite assumptions about young people as 'digital natives', our research (in line with other research³) indicates that pupils' ability to use websites effectively in relation to their own career development is limited; there is a need to support pupils not only to develop their digital literacy skills but to do so in the context of their career development.

3. There is now evidence from our research to assess the effectiveness of the modernisation of the careers service.

The interim report states that it is 'clearly too early to properly assess the effectiveness of the modernisation of the careers services.' (Recommendation 2, p 9): we believe that our research now offers evidence to do so. The new system has operated for a full academic year with sufficient of its elements in place to allow for measurement while the MyWoW website has been available to young people for much longer than this.

4. While feedback on careers provision from young people and parents is essential it is insufficient on its own: hard evidence is needed on whether provision makes a demonstrable and positive impact on young people in practice.

We welcome the statement that 'The need for meaningful and effective career advice is of fundamental importance' (Recommendation 2, p 9). The interim report then goes on to note that 'there should be continuous monitoring of the feedback [on the modernisation of careers services] from young people and their parents.' The evidence of our research is that such feedback on its own is insufficient to assess the effectiveness of career advice that the report recognises is necessary. . Young people stated that they liked and valued MyWoW but our examination of its impact showed that its effectiveness was limited compared with other sources of CIAG. The use of public resources

² Howieson and Semple (2013) *ibid*

³ Bennet, S., Maton, K. and Kervin, L. (2008) The 'digital natives' debate: a Critical review of the evidence, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 33(5), pp.775-786. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00793.x/abstract>; Hooley, T., Hutchinson, J. and Watts, A.G. (2010) *Careering Through the Web*, London: UKCES.; Hooley, T. (2012) How the internet changed career: framing the relationship between career development and online technologies, *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 29, p.3-12.

needs to be measured primarily on the basis of effectiveness and impact, not only on whether young people (and others) like them and say they have found them helpful.

We welcome 'Education Scotland's new involvement in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of careers services in our schools and of the implementation of the modernisation programme' but we repeat our statement that evaluation of effectiveness has to look at impact, and not just at perception. Furthermore, while Education Scotland staff are highly expert in education, career guidance is a different discipline, and training is likely to be required for such an evaluation to be well grounded.

5. Currently certain groups of pupils are missing out on CIAG.

The Wood Commission's thinking reflects a general concern in policy and practice for the most disengaged group of young people, and has a key focus on issues of equality. Our research found that certain groups of young people are currently missing out on CIAG provision, a form of support that is likely to challenge and broaden awareness of the range of opportunities open to young people (including vocational education and training routes).

Pupils most likely to miss out on support were those in the low attainment group and/or those who felt that school was not giving them the confidence to make decisions about the future; girls were also less likely to have accessed CIAG support than boys. In addition, we found very wide variation across schools in the extent to which pupils had accessed the different types of CIAG.

It is of concern that pupils who were uncertain about their career plans were less likely to engage with sources of CIAG. These pupils, however, are not currently given any priority in SDS policy although they need expert advice and support. SDS currently delivers CIAG to pupils in a targeted way, with the priority being given to those least likely to make a positive transition from school. The risk matrix used to assess the need for services is, however, largely based on social, economic and educational need. Pupils who are confused and uncertain about how to choose a post-school route or opportunity, and which one(s) would suit best, are not at present a priority for services. We suggest that SDS' and schools' risk matrices are adjusted to take account of career guidance need in addition to other factors.

6. In order to broaden and challenge stereotypical views of their possible futures, career education for Scotland's young people should begin in primary school

We welcome the Commission's interim report finding that 'there is a strong case to provide careers advice and knowledge of the world of work significantly earlier than the present S4 onwards' (Recommendation 2, p 8). However, given the recognition of the need to challenge and broaden ideas about vocational education and training), it is important to recognise that even the stages suggested are too late; gender stereotyping is already in place in primary one pupils, and this was recognised some years ago by Careers Scotland (as was) when it produced CareerBox, a set of teaching materials on career education and work-related learning (in its broadest definition) for pupils from ages 3-18. It is unfortunate that more recent decisions have moved SDS' focus on CIAG from career development throughout all the stages of education to a support service close to time of transition from school⁴.

⁴ Howieson C and Semple S (2013) Career Education, in T.G.K.Bryce W.M.Humes, D.Gillies and A.Kennedy (eds) [Scottish Education: Referendum, Fourth Edition](#), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

7. Providing a range of experiences to young people who are uncertain about their future career is unlikely to be effective without support to help them integrate the experiences into their career thinking.

The interim report states that ‘for those who are less certain about their future career, a range of experiences will help provide them with a good basis on which to make decisions’ (recommendation 9). We would suggest that while experiences are valuable they are not sufficient on their own to help vocationally uncertain pupils make decisions. Our work on Recognising Achievement for the Scottish Government found that without support from someone who knew them to help them reflect and learn from the experiences, young people were not able to integrate their various experiences into their vision of a personal future⁵.

8. Pupils’ own paid part-time employment provides opportunities for skill development (especially employability skills) and could be drawn on by schools.

Recommendation 2 of the interim report notes that ‘the approach to work experience needs to be developed to allow young people to have a richer experience of the workplace’ (p 9). The Commission is, however, missing out on another source through which young people learn about the workplace and develop relevant skills: their own paid part-time employment. Our research in 2006 on over 18,000 S3-S6 pupils in Scotland found that having a paid part-time job was a majority experience (even in S3 48% of pupils had experience of part-time employment, rising to 56% in S4; 65% in S5 and 82% in S6)⁶. The research found that employers valued it more highly than work experience as a preparation for the world of work and that part-time work could provide opportunities for learning and skill development, especially employability skills. However, there were few links between part-time work and schooling. It would be timely for the Commission to take account of this naturally occurring experience of the workplace in which that the majority of pupils are already engaged.

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⁵ Howieson C, Semple S and Jackson A (2009) National Evaluation of the Recognising Achievement Collaborative Enquiry Projects. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/303888/0095293.pdf>

⁶ Howieson C.,McKechnie J . Semple S (2012) [Working Pupils: Challenges and Potential](#), *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(4), pp.423–442; Howieson C.,McKechnie J . Semple S [The Nature and Implications of the Part-Time Employment of Secondary School Pupils](#), Edinburgh: SEELLD. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/11/10143236/113>