



Careers Work with Young People: Collapse or Transition?

An analysis of current developments in careers education and guidance for young people in England

Tristram Hooley & A.G. Watts

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International Centre for
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www.derby.ac.uk/icegs/

University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby, DE22 1GB
Tel: 01332 591267 Fax: 01332 597726

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International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby DE22 1GB
Tel: 01332 591267
Fax: 01332 597726
Email: icegsenquiry@derby.ac.uk
Head of Centre: Dr Tristram Hooley

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Executive summary

This paper analyses the current information available (in July 2011) about the changes that are taking place in careers work following recent government policy initiatives and public-sector austerity measures. In particular, it examines the local developments that have emerged in relation to a national policy context in which:

- Existing careers work is being radically reconfigured.
- The new National Careers Service (NCS) will principally serve adults (apart from its telephone/web-based services, which will cover young people too).
- Securing careers guidance for young people has been made the responsibility of schools.
- The requirement for schools to provide careers education has been removed.
- There has been very limited transition planning at national level: this has led to considerable local confusion.
- In particular, there is continuing confusion about the future relationship of remaining face-to-face Connexions services to the NCS, and about the branding of such services.

Implications for Connexions services, Local Authorities, schools, new market players and the careers profession are identified:

Connexions services

- Connexions services have been seriously damaged by the new environment. Most have made staff cuts, closed centres and undertaken restructuring processes. Some have reduced face-to-face services in favour of remote delivery.
- Many Connexions services have abandoned or reduced universal careers services and focused their services on vulnerable young people.
- Some Connexions services are developing an offer for schools to buy into.
- The Connexions brand seems likely to disappear in a growing number of areas.

Local Authorities

- Most Local Authorities have responded to the new policy environment by cutting funding to Connexions services, to a greater extent than the cuts to other services.
- Some Local Authorities have sought a way through the transition by restructuring (frequently by absorbing the remaining Connexions service into the Local Authority).
- Other Local Authorities have begun to explore ways to facilitate the creation of a local school-centred market in careers services.
- It is possible to summarise the main Local Authorities strategies as follows:
 - Extreme cutting (at least 12 Local Authorities).
 - Focusing solely on vulnerable young people (at least 49 Local Authorities).
 - Wait and see (at least 49 Local Authorities).
 - Working to sustain universal career guidance (at least 15 Local Authorities)

Schools

- The situation for schools is challenging: in addition to the erosion of Connexions, they have also lost support from Aimhigher and Education-Business Partnerships.
- The removal of the statutory duty to provide careers education could result in a focus on “activities”

rather than on a developmental curriculum.

- Many schools are unclear what their new responsibilities are and how best to discharge them.
- Some schools are exploring how best to deliver career support, with internal, external and multi-school models being explored.
- It is unclear how much resource schools will be able and willing to allocate to career support services, but it seems likely in most cases to be much less than previous provision.

New market players

- There is some evidence that new players are entering the school careers market, e.g. educational agencies, private career support providers and IT-based solutions.

The careers profession

- The current environment is having a potentially disastrous impact on the careers profession. In particular, the following issues are causing concern:
 - o Reduction in the number of posts.
 - o Downward pressure on pay and conditions.
 - o Loss of specialist careers roles within Local Authorities.
 - o Loss of experienced staff from the profession.
- These challenges to the careers profession could throw the wider project of re-professionalisation, being encouraged and supported by the Government, into doubt.

Local Authorities have limited scope within which to react to the changes that have been made by the Government. However, there is currently considerable diversity in the models that have begun to emerge. These include:

- Abandonment of universal careers work.
- Stretching of existing resources to continue to deliver a comparable (if significantly reduced) service.
- Encouraging school-based modes of delivery around either a single-school or multi-school approach.
- Development of a contracting-in approach to the delivery of careers services.

This new situation has emerged as a direct result of Government policies and actions. The paper discusses this new policy framework and concludes that:

- A new kind of market in careers work is beginning to emerge as a result of the current environment.
- This market is centred around schools as the sole consumers of careers services, effectively excluding all other stakeholders from direct market participation.
- Responsibility for resourcing career guidance has been moved from Local Authorities to schools, but without any transfer of funding.
- This is likely to reduce substantially the overall capacity to deliver career support for young people.
- The Government needs to review its roles in relation to the market in career support, in terms of:
 - o Stimulating the career support market in order to build its capacity.
 - o Regulating this market and assuring the quality of services within it.
 - o Compensating for market failures.

The paper concludes by setting out some key policy questions for the Government, for Local Authorities, for the careers profession, and for schools.

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to synthesise some of the current information related to the transition that is taking place in careers work with young people, including the role of previous Connexions services; to analyse this information; and to develop some conceptual models to inform future development. The main focus is on schools, though many of the points made are also relevant to colleges and to training providers.

The provision of career guidance to young people has a long if somewhat chequered history in public policy. Peck (2004) argues that government policies in this area have been characterised by a growing awareness of the public value of career guidance, but also by an uncertain administrative framework. The current transitional situation demonstrates this clearly: whilst there have been strong endorsements by the new Coalition Government of the value of career guidance (see Watts, 2011a), the framework that is emerging for its delivery is uncertain and possesses considerable risk elements.

Yet there is a considerable evidence base on the social and economic impact of career guidance with young people (Hughes & Gratian, 2009). A recent literature review on careers work in schools (Hooley, Sampson & Marriott, 2011) concluded that impacts could be identified in retaining young people within education, motivating their academic achievement, supporting their transition to further learning and work, and enabling life and career success. Other research demonstrates that career guidance can impact positively on economic productivity (Access Economics, 2006) and social equality (Hutchinson et al., 2011).

It is in this context that the current Government has enacted a raft of policies and funding decisions that are radically reframing the way in which careers work is delivered to young people. Key elements of the new policy environment (for a more detailed analysis, see Watts, 2011a) include:

- Changes set out in the Education Bill, notably the removal of the requirement to provide careers education and the enactment of a new statutory duty for schools to “secure that all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance during the relevant phase of their education” (though with the clarification that this can be met, minimally, through providing access to web-based or telephone services).
- The merging of Connexions funding into the Early Intervention Grant, which is to be reduced by 10.9% to £2,212m in 2011/12 and then increased by 3.8% to £2,297m in 2012/13.
- Guidance from the Department for Education (2011) which indicates that Local Authorities no longer have a responsibility to provide universal careers services.
- The effective deletion, through a combination of cuts and the removal of responsibility, of around £200 million of funding (the notional careers-related Connexions funding) from the careers sector.
- The development of a National Careers Service, which is theoretically an all-age service but in practice is to be mainly focused on adult advice and guidance (supported by funding of £84 million from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), with its directly-funded services for young people confined to telephone- and web-based services (supported by funding from the Department for Education of £4.7 million (DfE, 2011c)).
- The lack of any strategic transitional plan from the Government.

These decisions have rapidly fed through from the policy level and have already begun to unravel existing service-delivery models. New arrangements have begun to develop in advance of the legislative framework that will ultimately support them if the Education Bill is passed. In particular, the financial and political drivers on Local Authorities have been sufficient to ensure that many of them have sought to make savings and/or re-position themselves in anticipation of the passage of the Bill. This has led Unison (2010) to argue that many Local Authorities are failing to comply with their legislative duties.

This paper will attempt to map what is happening in these complex transitional arrangements and to identify some of the patterns that are emerging. Information was collected from a range of sources including:¹

- A survey carried out for the Institute of Career Guidance (Nicholls, 2011).
- Information passed to us from Unison, including the Unison Survey Findings (Unison, 2011a).
- Information passed to us from Careers England.
- Information solicited from Local Authority participants in the online community of practice concerned with "Careers Guidance" (www.communities.idea.gov.uk) following the post of a draft of this paper and of the accompanying dataset.
- Information posted on Tristram Hooley's blog (<http://adventuresincareerdevelopment.posterous.com>) in response to calls for submissions.
- The collection of Google alerts triggered by the keywords "Connexions cuts" between 27 July 2010 and 5 July 2011. This mainly picked up local and trade press articles.
- Private correspondence with Connexions staff and other key players.
- The Connexions cuts database compiled by A Thousand Cuts (2010).
- Using Google News searches to fill gaps.

To date, information has been secured relating to 144 of the 150 Local Authorities (96%). The information that has been gathered was collected from different sources for a range of different purposes and does not all cover the same issues. Accordingly, figures given in this paper should be seen as minima rather than actual figures. Sources are named where possible, although several people who contacted the authors of the report asked to remain anonymous.

2. Understanding the nature of the change

Much commentary so far has focused on the cuts to Connexions services in terms both of the reduction of services to young people and of the impact on careers professionals through redundancies and restructuring. However, the decision to make cuts to young people's careers services is only one part of the story. Equally important has been the lack of any national transitional plan for managing the change.

One implication of this lack of a transitional plan is that national resources which have been developed to support local Connexions work are currently languishing. Critically, the Connexions Direct site and the Jobs4U database have been replaced with an inelegant redirect page that sends users to one of the following:

- [Directgov>Young People](http://Directgov/Young People).
- Information about accessing distance guidance services on a degraded version of the Connexions Direct site.
- The job profiles section of the Next Step website.
- An archived version of the Connexions Direct site.
- A new item on the DfE website.

At present no publicly visible plan exists to indicate how this messy interim situation will be resolved. The existing Connexions Direct resources are to be merged into the new National Careers Service. However, the Prime Minister's Office (2011) has publicly supported discussions relating to a What's Your Destination (<http://www.whatsyourdestination.co.uk/>) initiative which seems to offer an alternative site with somewhat similar aims. It is unclear how this latter site will be funded and how it will relate to the NCS site.

¹ Information on each Local Authority is available on the iCeGS website: www.derby.ac.uk/icegs

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A further implication of the lack of national transition planning has been considerable confusion as the various local stakeholders have wrestled with the implications of the new policy decisions. In South London (Bromley, Croydon, Merton, Richmond, Sutton), for example, this has meant disputes between stakeholders about who holds the responsibility for employing and making staff redundant. For those involved in planning at the local level, it has been unclear what will be provided at the national level. Consequently, diverse models of local delivery are emerging, which this paper will attempt to describe.

A key outstanding issue is the relationship of remaining Connexions services to the new National Careers Service (NCS). It seems clear that direct Department for Education funding for the NCS is to be confined to telephone- and web-based services (see Section 1 above). But John Hayes, the Minister responsible, has stated that: "I want organisations that are part of the national careers service to provide information, advice and guidance of such quality that schools will commission their services" (Hayes, 2011). The only face-to-face career guidance providers that at present are assured to be part of the NCS are those which have existing contracts with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to provide career information, advice and guidance to adults. The current assumption seems to be that if schools purchase their services, this will be outside their NCS contracts, but that their NCS quality standards will still be applied (John Hayes stated that the NCS "will provide a visible public platform which champions the quality and professional standards, which I think are crucial to the re-establishment of careers guidance as a true, respected profession" (ibid)). Given this, questions remain about how the NCS role as a "public platform" for careers work will operate in practice and how it will relate, if at all, to previous Connexions face-to-face services that are not managed by NCS contract holders.

A linked issue is branding. It seems that the Connexions brand is viewed fairly widely (whether justly or unjustly) as being tarnished, and is likely to disappear in a growing number of areas. If the NCS brand cannot be applied to local face-to-face services for young people (except loosely by association in the case of suppliers with SFA contracts for work with adults), there will no longer be a publicly discernible service that can provide the basis for marketing and publicity.

The frequent co-location and shared management structures of Connexions and Next Step providers also raise some issues about the potential impact of cuts to Connexions on the infrastructure of the new NCS. There are a number of Local Authorities in which both the back-office functions and high-street presence of the two careers services have been shared. The diminution or closure of Connexions is therefore likely to have an impact on the viability of NCS contracts for services to adults. Indeed, the issue runs deeper still, since Connexions companies have frequently acted as hubs for other educational and social welfare contracts. The removal of Connexions funding (or its atomisation into smaller pieces within Local Authorities) therefore has the potential to adversely affect the local infrastructures through which both young people and adults are supported in a range of ways.

This paper's description of the transition will examine in turn the behaviour of a range of different stakeholders, as follows:

- The organisational structures and continuity of **existing Connexions services**.
- The role of **Local Authorities** in the management of the transition.
- The responses of **schools** to the changed situation.
- The emergence of **new market players**.
- The impact on the **careers profession**.

2.1. The organisational structures and continuity of existing Connexions services

Subsequent to 2008, Connexions services have been delivered through three main models (McGowan, Watts & Andrews, 2009). In around 30% of Local Authorities, they have been delivered in-house by the Local Authorities themselves: these services are likely to be particularly sensitive to changes in the strategic direction of the overall Local Authority. In the rest, they have been contracted either to the previous sub-regional Connexions Partnership, or to another provider (usually a careers company). Even in these cases, the movement into a transitional period has been rapid and has in many places run in advance of the new legislative framework.

Following the recent changes, most Connexions services have undertaken some or all of the following:

- Reducing staffing levels, including – in many cases – making staff redundant. Such reductions have occurred in at least 105 Local Authorities.
- Closure of physical centres (in at least 50 Local Authorities).
- Restructuring (usually to subsume what remains of the service more completely into the Local Authority) (difficult to quantify given the wide range of restructuring options).
- Shifting the balance towards targeted services (e.g. work with NEETs and other vulnerable young people) and a reduction or removal of universal careers services (in at least 65 Local Authorities).
- In some areas, plans to reduce or remove face-to-face services, leaving only a phone/email/web service (e.g. Greenwich, Suffolk).
- Reliance on existing non-Connexions contracts, or actively seeking new areas of business or sources of funding (e.g. the Cabinet Office Transition Fund, and a variety of small-project funding).
- Developing an offer for schools to buy into (in at least 40 Local Authorities).
- Building of new partnerships in order to position Connexions/careers companies for the new market. For example, a number of such companies (Leicestershire Connexions Services Ltd, Careers South West Ltd, Connexions Cheshire & Warrington, Connexions Cumbria, Connexions Thames Valley, Coventry Solihull & Warwickshire Partnership, Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership, Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Futures) have come together to form TransitionsPlus UK Ltd (TPUK), with the capacity to offer services across the country.

More detailed examples of some of these developments are outlined in Section 3 below.

2.2. The role of Local Authorities in the management of transition

Recent Government guidance (DfE, 2011a) has indicated that although Local Authorities retain their responsibilities in relation to vulnerable young people, there is “no expectation that local authorities should provide universal careers services once the new careers service is established and the duty on schools has been commenced”.

Unison et al. (2011) suggested that Local Authorities should be guided by the following transitional principles:

- maintaining a quality service to individuals sufficient to meet the required statutory duties;
- ensuring clarity in roles and responsibilities;
- ring-fencing dedicated funds for careers service provision;
- establishing robust management systems in relation to retention of qualified and competent careers practitioners through redeployment and/or Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) arrangements;
- consistency, openness and fairness in any redundancy selection processes;
- working with externally contracted suppliers in relevant parts of the Connexions service to secure a smooth transition.

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But how far Local Authorities seek to work within these principles is likely to be highly variable. In response to reductions in their funding, many Local Authorities have cut funding to Connexions services, to a greater extent than the cuts to their other services. As a recent statement from careers sector employers, professional bodies and unions stated, the current situation has “permitted local authorities to treat the existing careers guidance services as a soft target for cuts in advance of the transfer of statutory responsibility” (Careers England et al., 2011).

Respondents to the survey of careers workers by the ICG (Nicholls, 2011) reported that many Local Authorities are already ceasing to provide universal careers services, although retaining some level of support for vulnerable young people. Despite Local Authorities moving to make staffing and service cuts in relation to Connexions, there was evidence of lack of strategic planning in many places, exacerbated by continuing confusion relating to the respective responsibilities of Local Authorities and schools.

However, some Local Authorities have responded in a more strategic way. In some cases, this has involved restructuring: for example, closing the Connexions organisation and integrating it into the Local Authority (e.g. Derby/Derbyshire, Surrey), TUPEing external employees into Local Authority employment (e.g. Brighton & Hove, Herefordshire), restructuring Connexions into an integrated youth service (e.g. Durham, Haringey) or floating staff out into a new organisation (e.g. Northamptonshire has established a “community interest company” which will offer an integrated youth service including career guidance). The extent to which multi-agency teams contain distinctive careers roles is unclear, but is likely to be much less than in the past. This seems likely to produce further erosion of the distinctive professionalism of career guidance practitioners – in direct contradiction to Government policies in this respect (see introduction to Section 2 above, and Section 2.5 below).

Other Local Authorities have made some initial moves to develop a transitional offer. These include many of the changes to service delivery already listed in Section 2.1 (shifting the balance to more targeted delivery, developing paid offers for schools, etc.) as well as more strategic moves such as establishing a means of supporting schools in procuring and purchasing careers services from other organisations. For example, Leeds is issuing an approved list of career guidance providers for schools; whilst Blackburn with Darwen has worked with schools and the local Connexions company to establish an Education Improvement Partnership (EIP) that can support consortia approaches to sharing strategy, practice and procurement arrangements.

In addition, Local Authorities retain the responsibility (which was previously dealt with by the Connexions provider) for tracking young people and providing the data that will underpin the new destination measure (DfE, 2011b). It remains unclear how the logistics of this process will be managed to ensure reliable and valid data, given that this activity has previously been heavily dependent on a network of Connexions Personal Advisers, a data infrastructure typically managed by Connexions services, and a close link between tracking and helping interventions (a link which now seems likely to be significantly uncoupled).

It is possible to summarise the main Local Authority strategies as follows:

1. **Extreme cutting.** In at least 12 Local Authorities, the Connexions service has been radically cut, often alongside cuts in other related services. In these areas, very little remains of the careers element of Connexions and even the services for vulnerable young people have been pruned.
2. **Focusing solely on vulnerable young people.** At least 49 other Local Authorities have removed or reduced the universal careers element of the Connexions service, and have restructured the service to focus exclusively on support for vulnerable young people. A key issue in these Authorities in particular is how vulnerable young people are defined. One Local Authority manager described his Authority as being “in a process of reviewing and re-defining what we mean by vulnerable young people...to ensure that it is not a crude and unhelpful cut-off”.

3. **Wait and see.** At least 49 Local Authorities have maintained some universal careers element in their service provision, although often with considerable resourcing cuts. These authorities may decide to review this position following the passage of the Education Bill.
4. **Working to sustain universal career guidance.** At least 15 Local Authorities have worked to maintain a substantial universal careers element in their service provision.² A careers adviser quoted on the Unison website describes how his Local Authority has dealt with cuts: "I work in an area that takes careers guidance and the futures of its young people very seriously. Despite the cuts, the local authority has sought to distribute the cuts equally at local level and has not singled out Connexions as easy prey – as some other local authority areas seem to have done." It remains to be seen whether the Local Authorities that have demonstrated their valuing of career guidance in these ways will be able to maintain this stance following the passage of the Education Bill.

For the remaining 25 Local Authorities, insufficient information is available to permit categorisation in these terms.

Given these changes, a key question that will be addressed in Section 3 of this paper is which of the different moves that are being made by Local Authorities prefigure or interact with the longer-term models that will need to be developed if the Education Bill becomes law without significant amendment.

2.3. The responses of schools to the changed situation

For schools, the situation is challenging, as they have suddenly been allocated a new responsibility to procure a service which they had previously received free of charge. Furthermore, schools have not just lost the service provided by Connexions but also those provided by, for example, Aimhigher and Education Business Partnerships. The policy of school autonomy means that the Government envisages schools solving these problems largely on their own and, importantly, out of their existing funds (except for schools with substantial pupil-premium funding).

Some schools are experiencing difficulties in simply understanding the nature and extent of the changes. One Connexions employee contacted the authors of this paper to say: "Schools seem generally unclear about what will be happening with careers and in the school I am based, it appears to be lost in the massive changes occurring due to becoming an academy!" Another Connexions manager noted: "What they (schools) do not fully appreciate is the disappearance of any local careers infrastructure. There will be no local careers centre and no out of hours/out of term provision other than telephone/on-line unless a school purchases this." However, in many areas the Connexions Service has undertaken the role of communicating the new policy to schools and helping them to work through the implications. For example, in Solihull schools have been working with Connexions staff to develop a mutually acceptable paid offer for the period after March 2012 when the current offer ceases.

This new situation raises a number of challenges:

- Understanding the shifting context and recognising their new responsibilities within it.
- Making strategic decisions about what kinds and levels of services to provide and/or procure.
- Developing systems and processes to enable the procurement of services.

² The Local Authorities identified within this category are Blackburn with Darwen, Buckinghamshire, Bury, Calderdale, Gateshead, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kirklees, Lincolnshire, Redbridge, Sandwell, Solihull, Somerset, Stoke-on-Trent and Telford & Wrekin.

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Schools are managing this in a number of ways. Many remain keen to continue to deal with the same organisations and/or individuals that they previously dealt with, as this is “the easiest thing for busy headteachers to do” (email from a School Governor). In some of these cases, named individuals are being specified, to assure quality. The nature of what schools are buying in will be discussed in Section 3.

Other schools, however, are exploring alternative ways to deliver careers services. One Connexions adviser commented: “Early feedback from the schools is that they have lost trust in the LA and they will be trying to find ways of delivering this themselves, either by employing an advisor directly or by using existing school staff.”

Finally, there is the question of how much schools are able and willing to pay for career guidance, especially when it is competing for funds with a wide range of other valuable services (including, for example, centralised sports co-ordination, educational psychology and welfare services), not to mention their own staffing budgets. Certainly there are a number of schools which have a track record of strong investment in careers work (an example is Newstead Wood School in Bromley, which employs a full-time careers professional and offers an extensive range of careers support for pupils). However, the evidence suggests that these schools will continue to be the exception rather than the rule even once schools have sole responsibility for careers. Respondents to the ICG’s survey of members (Nicholls, 2011) suggest that schools are unlikely to buy in anything like the level of service that had previously been provided. A careers adviser quoted on Unison’s website (2011b) argues that “without the proper funding to buy in contracted services, schools will in no way be able to provide anything like the information, advice and guidance that has been available to previous generations”.

A question remains as to whether schools may seek alternative/new sources of funding for the career support that they provide. The main options in this area would seem to be:

- **Government funding.** Some schools and career guidance providers are examining what additional government funding might exist. In particular, the possibility of using some of the pupil-premium funding for this purpose is being explored.
- **Charity funding.** The possibility of charity funding clearly exists but is unlikely to be a sustainable solution for the majority of schools.
- **Parent funding.** Independent schools charge parents for career support, either as an integral part of school fees or as an additional fee. In some state schools (e.g. Newstead Wood School in Bromley – see above), some support for careers activities is provided by the parents committee. Any increases in funding from this source are likely to favour pupils from more affluent families or those living in more affluent areas.
- **Opportunity provider funding.** Another option would be to import career support from opportunity providers such as universities and employers. Universities are currently in the process of developing their offers in this area under their new fair-access agreements. There is also already a considerable raft of practice which demonstrates employers’ willingness to provide various forms of career support in schools (Education and Employers Taskforce, 2010). However, there are clearly questions about the breadth and impartiality of these kinds of opportunity-provider-based services. Most are designed to supplement rather than replace mainstream career guidance provision.

Section 3 discusses some of the strategies that schools are using to source career support services. Implications of current developments for careers education programmes are explored in Section 4.4.

2.4. The emergence of new market players

Connexions services and Local Authorities have been developing new service offers for schools on a variety of payment bases. It is likely that this new marketised environment will result in a considerable reduction of

resourcing for previous Connexions providers. However, for some other providers, the new market in career support for schools may be viewed as offering a business opportunity. There are signs that some existing Connexions staff and other careers professionals are establishing small companies or social businesses with the idea of selling their services to schools. There is also evidence that some educational agencies of the kind usually involved in providing supply teachers to schools are signing up ex-Connexions staff. The approach likely to be taken by many of these agencies is to conceive the delivery of career support as part of a school's broader flexible staffing needs. If this is the case, it may be that contracts become term-time only, in order to drive down costs.

If the current marketised environment endures, it is likely that other kinds of players may enter the field. These may include organisations that sell technological solutions, packaged curriculum interventions, brokerage offers that provide access to the labour market (for example, through the provision of work-related learning or internships), and various kinds of consultancy, in addition to or in place of the existing interview-based offers.

Much of the current offers by Connexions companies, Local Authorities and new players is reliant on the existence of a substantial pool of flexible, but skilled and experienced, labour. This pool has been brought into existence by the collapse of Connexions staffing, but is unlikely to endure as staff find jobs, or retrain and move away from the careers sector.

2.5. The impact on the careers profession

The ICG survey (Nicholls, 2011) reports widespread redundancies and demoralisation among careers professionals about the immediate and long-term future of careers work. Respondents to this survey report that, within Local Authorities, many careers professionals' roles are being reconceived as generalist youth worker roles. Furthermore, the shape of some of the redundancy packages, alongside the move to new and often more poorly paid roles, is tending to encourage experienced staff to leave, with a resulting loss of skills. A small number of current or recent Connexions Personal Advisers who have contacted the authors during the research for this paper have outlined plans to retrain in fields like social work, clinical psychology or occupational therapy.

The impact of the funding cuts and reshaping of Local Authorities' duties creates an employment climate in which the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) – accepted and supported by the Coalition Government, and currently being pursued with energy by the Careers Profession Alliance and others – will struggle to take root. Drives to increase professionalisation and the level of qualification of the workforce are likely to be extremely challenging in a period where careers professionals are in insecure employment, salaries are falling, and employers are trying to meet service requirements with reduced resources. Furthermore, given the Government's apparent reluctance to require or even recommend a minimum level of qualification for careers work in schools, serious questions must be asked about the viability of the Task Force's recommendations on such levels.

Key issues for the profession in moving forward from the current situation include:

- The loss of professional capacity as people leave the profession and are not replaced.
- Downward pressure on salaries, making demands to professionalise and routinely ensure Level 6 qualifications more difficult to sustain.
- Removal of a large number of "Careers Adviser" posts and their replacement with alternative roles, e.g. "Young Persons' Support Worker" (Stockport), "Key Worker" (Bolton).
- Lack of clarity about who the main employers of careers professionals are likely to be, and the nature of their roles (see Section 4.4 below).

- The need to compete in a much more open market, with – in some cases – little quality assurance or requirement to demonstrate qualifications or professional status.
- The challenge of maintaining the principle of impartiality in an environment where funding and, possibly, employment are dependent on schools.
- Loss of sufficient capacity to achieve chartered status. Such status requires a membership body to be in existence with more than 5,000 members (Privy Council, 2011). Given that the Careers Profession Task Force (2010:14) estimated a combined membership of 8,698 for all membership bodies in the field, substantial job losses³ may throw the project of chartered status into doubt.

3. Emergent models

Given the diverse and complex situation that is emerging, it is important to try to identify some emerging patterns or models. We are currently in a transitional period, and many of the service models that seem to be emerging may not survive as the situation becomes more stable. Local Authorities are at present in the position of managing cuts while delivering on existing duties, yet at the same time preparing for a new set of radically different duties. This means that all of the emerging models are likely to continue to evolve. A key question therefore is how far the transitional models prefigure or interact with the longer-term models that will need to be developed if and when the Education Bill becomes law.

It is important to note that the models set out below are not mutually exclusive. The Government is keen to see a market approach develop. If this is to be the case, it is likely that a number of different approaches may compete within a single Local Authority. With this caveat, the main models seem to be:

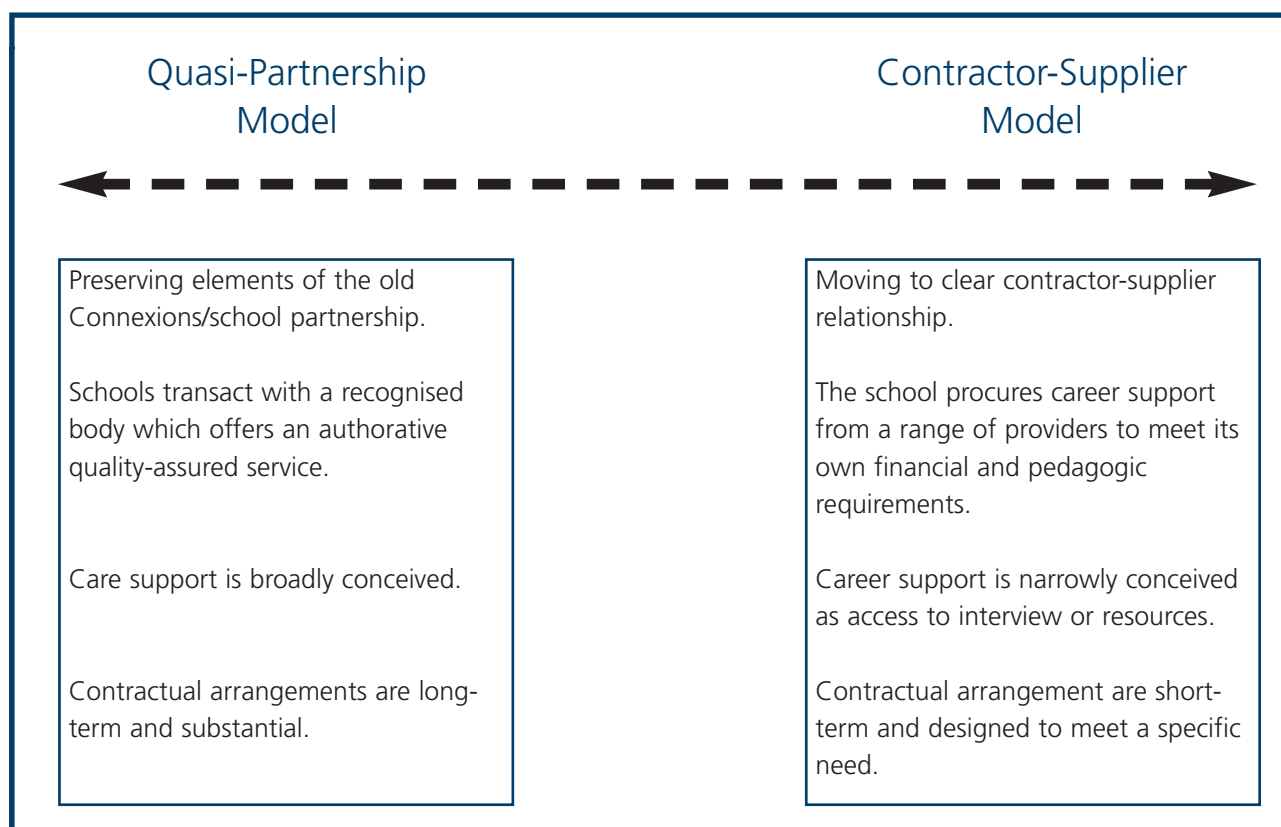
1. **Abandonment.** The effective immediate abandonment of universal careers work by Local Authorities. In all such cases, some targeted services are being retained for vulnerable young people, although the level of resourcing for these may be reduced, and the services may not include any discernible careers element.
2. **Stretching.** An attempt is being made by some Local Authorities and Connexions companies to continue to deliver some kind of universal careers service based on the funding for vulnerable young people and any other available funding; in a few cases, this universal offer is online or telephone-based only. This model seems likely to be essentially a response to transition and a way of managing change. In the longer run, it seems unlikely that many Local Authorities will continue to offer services which they have no obligation to provide, especially in the light of continuing resource scarcity.
3. **School-based.** Some schools already employ staff to manage or deliver career support within the school. Many of these staff are best described as Careers Co-ordinators: they may or may not be teachers (if they are not, they may be more accurately described as Careers Administrators) and may or may not have professional training in this area (McCrone et al., 2009). Other schools employ a careers professional to deliver services: this may be akin to a traditional Careers Adviser role, or may incorporate some elements of both Careers Adviser and Careers Co-ordinator roles. Depending on the size of the school, its resources and the level of priority it places on this area, these posts may be full-time, part-time or term-time only. There is some evidence that an increasing number of schools are seeking a school-based solution in one of the following ways:

³ The dataset available on the iCeGS website attempts to track job losses by each Local Authority. This gives an estimated figure of 2,627.3 job losses; however, information was not available for all Local Authorities. Unison (private correspondence) estimates that, in total, 4,000 Connexions jobs have been lost since the General Election. It is difficult to verify an exact number of careers professional roles that have been lost, particularly as some previous careers-focused roles have been transformed into broader roles that may mean people being lost to the profession without necessarily registering as a job loss. On the other hand, not all of the Connexions job losses are careers professionals or members of careers professional bodies.

- a. **Single-school approach:** New career support capacity is being added to the school establishment.
 - b. **Multi-school approach:** Consortia of schools are coming together to employ a career support resource that is then shared across the consortia. These consortia are currently organised in a range of ways and may either build on existing partnership arrangements or develop new arrangements specific to the delivery of careers. In Surrey, for example, a network of six secondary schools (two with sixth-forms) have negotiated with the local Connexions service to purchase the services of a Personal Adviser for the equivalent of four days a week, shared across the six schools (Morris, 2011). In South-East London and Kent, a number of schools have formed a Schools Careers Partnership to facilitate the sharing of good practice and enable the exchange of services where appropriate. Elsewhere, one Careers Co-ordinator described his school's plans as follows: "I hope to encourage a new set up in the town where myself, and a few others, from the non-academy schools are trained to the required standard and 'lent' around the town for some days a week to try and sustain something approaching a universal service."
4. **Contracting-in.** At the moment the most dominant model seems to be based on a "contracting in" approach. In this model, schools buy a package of career support from an external provider. As with the school-based model, contracting-in approaches can be based on either a single-school or a multi-school approach. There is, for instance, an attempt in Blackburn with Darwen to engage all local schools in a collective contracting arrangement: if this is successful, it will mean that the contract for universal careers services is effectively transferred from the Local Authority to the consortium organisation (Education Improvement Partnership) and that a comparable level of service is preserved. However, this kind of comprehensive and collective solution does not appear to be common across the sector.

The nature of the relationships that exist between schools and providers is still in flux, but it is possible to identify a continuum from a quasi-partnership model to a contractor-supplier model (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A continuum of contracting-in approaches



Even where “contracting-in” approaches preserve much of the traditional partnership relationship, the balance of power and responsibility in the partnership has been shifted towards the school. Previously, the partnership model – based on schools having a primary responsibility for careers education, and Connexions for career guidance – ensured independence and impartiality through a structural and legal relationship that was underpinned by separate funding on both sides (Watts, 2008). The new approach effectively requires schools themselves to deliver on impartiality and independence, even where this may be in conflict with the school’s short-term organisational interests (e.g. filling the sixth form). Should the Government wish to exert influence on the actions of schools in this respect, the only policy levers that remain are the relatively blunt instrument of the destination measures (see Section 4.3 below) and quality assurance through Ofsted and/or through voluntary quality awards (e.g. Career Mark, Investors in Careers).

In many areas it is currently unclear which services schools will seek to buy or which service providers will be able to offer. One Local Authority Careers Adviser described their paid offer as “vague at the moment”. However, a number of providers are beginning to develop offers in discussion with schools. These may include:

- interviews for all year 11 pupils;
- group careers or options sessions;
- the provision of training for teachers and other school staff to help schools to support their students;
- arranging visits to FE and HE institutions;
- sourcing external speakers;
- taking over activities previously run by Aimhigher.

A key question that underpins both the school-based and “contracting-in” models is what level of priority and resourcing schools are likely to assign to the provision of career support, amongst all of their other responsibilities. The current policy seems to have been launched with little or no market research in this area. No business modelling has been made available to demonstrate the likely impacts on service provision of different levels of resourcing.

If the policy is to be successful, it is likely that both schools and potential providers will need a period of time to reorient, consider their requirements and develop a service offer. While at least 40 Local Authorities have developed some kind of costed offer for schools in their areas, in many cases this has been done quickly and with little clarity as to whether it is attuned to schools’ resources and perceived needs.

An interesting approach to these issues has been taken in Lincolnshire, where a new career guidance service has been formed out of the restructuring. The service will be funded by the Local Authority until September 2012, at which point it will need to be self-sustaining. The expectation is that income will be generated from school commissions, Next Step/NCS sub-contracts and possibly some targeted Local Authority funding. While this model remains ultimately dependent on funding decisions at the school level, it at least offers the service time to develop a coherent offer which meets schools’ needs.

4. Discussion

4.1. The nature of the “market”

Out of the current period of transition, a market in career support is beginning to emerge. Whereas previous service provision arrangements were managed through a quasi-market overseen by Government, the new arrangements have more features of a genuine market (though still within the confines of public funding). This is producing a difficult transition for many of the existing local players, as they relinquish their “monopoly” position. However, we are also seeing the beginning of the development of new kinds of offer by new market

players. Given the Government's enthusiasm for market-based approaches, it might be possible to conclude that, within its own terms, the policy is beginning to have an impact. Whether the market ultimately flourishes or collapses will depend on the consumer decisions that schools will have to make about how much they value career support and how much they are prepared to pay.

In considering the likely success or otherwise of the current policy, it is important to note two major limitations to the market as it is currently composed:

1. **Schools as sole consumers.** The new market in careers support is driven by schools and therefore exists to meet their needs. The present framing of the market does not include a role for the individual end-user (young people) or any other stakeholder (parents, universities/colleges, employers), except insofar as schools are sensitive to their interests and concerns. Yet all of these parties have a substantial direct stake in the career support that is delivered. The market is therefore mono-dimensional and as such is unlikely to serve effectively as a mechanism for delivering the best service for those who are currently excluded from participating actively in it.
2. **The continuity of public funding.** Despite the climate of cuts and the rhetoric of the "Big Society" (HM Government, 2010), the new arrangements continue to place sole responsibility for the delivery of career support on the public purse. Resourcing has been shifted and downscaled, but the new arrangements continue to work firmly within the frame of public-sector funding. If the Government's policy proves effective in delivering high-quality career guidance to all young people (which is still highly questionable), it will have shifted the costs around the system rather than actually saving money or transferring costs away from the public purse. The point being made here is not to question the desirability of funding career support for young people from the public purse, but rather to recognise that the current debate is about the identification of the most effective mechanism for administering such public funding.

4.2. The transitional period

It is possible to see the current period of transition as operating on three levels:

- Resourcing.
- Structures.
- Delivery.

All three can be addressed independently, but they are also closely inter-linked.

Resourcing: The transition has been largely driven by a change in the level of resourcing that is available for careers support for young people. The impact of this change in resources was always going to be substantial, but has arguably been even more severe because of the lack of attention to issues related to the structures and delivery of services. As argued above, it is possible that some new resourcing for this activity will be found out of schools' budgets, but the current evidence suggests that schools are very unlikely to devote an equivalent sum to that available previously to providing career support, and that service levels will correspondingly decline.

Structures: Whatever level of resourcing is available requires some form of structure to administer it. As has already been argued, the changes that the Government is making are primarily concerned with changing the level of public resourcing, but they are also relocating responsibility with schools and using schools to drive the nature and extent of the service that is provided. The situation that has emerged is therefore neither accidental nor natural. The functioning of markets is framed by public policy, especially if all of the resource within that market is public resource. The decision to conceive schools as the sole consumers, rather than also to conceive Local Authorities or parents or employers or pupils as consumers, is therefore a policy decision that represents only one possible way to structure the delivery of services.

Delivery: Finally, the actual delivery of the service flows in part from the resourcing and structures, but is also an area over which schools and careers practitioners retain some control. It is currently unclear what models of delivery are likely to emerge from this period of transition. The evidence about effectiveness tends to emphasise delivery features such as early intervention, connection to the academic curriculum and multi-modal delivery as being important (see Hooley, Marriott & Sampson, 2011). Other research suggests that the partnership model is also an important feature of delivery as it guarantees independence, impartiality and connection to the labour market (Morris et al., 2000; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2008). The policy of school autonomy might suggest that the Government will remain outside delivery decisions, but its framing of the statutory duty leads towards delivery models which do not have an evident evidence base.

4.3. Government roles in relation to the “market” in career support

There has been considerable discussion of how Government might relate to a market in career support (e.g. OECD, 2004; Watts, Hughes & Wood, 2005; Hooley, Hutchinson & Watts, 2010; Bimrose, Hughes & Barnes, 2011). In this discussion, Government is seen as fulfilling three main roles in relation to this market:

- Stimulating the career support market in order to build its capacity.
- Regulating this market and assuring the quality of services within it.
- Compensating for market failures.

The current period of transition appears to be **stimulating** the career support market in terms of entrepreneurial activity, but it is questionable whether its overall capacity will be built: indeed, it seems highly likely that the reverse will be the case. The decision to transfer responsibility to schools without any discernible funding is likely to reduce substantially the overall capacity to deliver career support for young people. Where this transfer has been attempted elsewhere in the world (notably, New Zealand and the Netherlands) the impact has been erosion of services (Watts, 2011b). Yet in both New Zealand and the Netherlands, funding was made available to schools to support the transition. Without funding or other levers to encourage strong engagement by schools in this agenda, significant erosion of capacity seems the most likely outcome.

On the issue of Government’s role in the **regulation** of career support, the current Government stance seems ambivalent. Ministers’ decision to welcome the report of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010), and their promise to implement its recommendations (see Watts 2011a), have not so far stretched to specifying that schools must work with a quality-assured professional service in offers that they develop (e.g. using Matrix for this purpose); there is also, as noted in Section 2.5, concern about the impact of current staffing cuts on the re-professionalisation project. Moreover, although there is a commitment to inspect careers provision via Ofsted, the policy is currently to maintain a light-touch approach. Much emphasis is being placed by Ministers on the new destination measures (Hayes, 2011), but this seems likely to measure only the proportions entering a “positive destination”, with no indication of the appropriateness of that destination to the talents, interests and ambitions of the individual concerned.

Finally, the question of **compensating for market failure** remains largely unanswered. The policy of school autonomy inevitably means that there will be a range of different practices across different schools. From what can be seen from the transitional situation, it seems likely that this diversity will be experienced both in the approach to delivery and in the level of engagement with the idea of career support. However, it is not clear what the Government would consider to be a market failure in this area. It is therefore uncertain whether and when it would act, and on what basis.

4.4. The development of professional practice

Consideration of the policy, transitional arrangements and developments in Local Authorities discussed in this paper suggests that some very substantial changes to the nature of careers practice are likely to be evident over the next year or two. McGowan, Watts & Andrews (2009) observed considerable local variations in the extent and nature of the focus of Connexions services on the careers element of their work. As argued in Sections 2 and 3 of this report, this diversity is now likely to grow still further. In general, it is likely to be more difficult to maintain universal careers services, although at present a number of Local Authorities remain committed to doing so.

What scope there is likely to be within these new arrangements for career practitioners to innovate and develop services is currently difficult to foresee. A key issue is the extent to which an identifiable careers role is likely to remain, and what form this role is likely to take. The professionalism which the Government is seeking to endorse and promote is dependent on individuals identifying with the careers profession and building networks that include other professionals and professional bodies. Within integrated youth support teams with no clear specialist roles, it is likely to be more difficult for this professionalism to be maintained. Much therefore depends on the roles that evolve in relation to careers work in schools, both internally and externally.

Hitherto, careers work in schools has been based on a partnership model between schools and the Connexions service, with Careers Advisers being typically employed by the latter and Careers Educators (including Careers Co-ordinators) by the former. While almost all Careers Advisers have considered themselves to be careers professionals, not all Careers Educators have done so; most have viewed themselves primarily as members of the teaching profession (Careers Profession Task Force, 2010). In addition, the overwhelming majority of Local Authorities have provided support for careers education in schools in the form of curriculum support and INSET, either through Connexions or in other ways (McGowan, Watts & Andrews, 2009).

With the statutory requirement for careers education being dropped under the terms of the Education Bill, schools will be free to sustain and develop careers education or to abandon it. Ministerial statements have tended to refer not to a "curriculum" but to a range of "information and activities" (see Watts, 2011a): this could be perceived as requiring administrative rather than pedagogic skills. Yet the evidence suggests that developmental careers programmes which start early and contain curriculum interventions as well as guidance interviews and other interventions are more effective than isolated information and advice sessions (see Bowes, Smith & Morgan, 2005; Hooley, Marriott & Sampson, 2011).

It seems likely that the clarity of the distinction between Careers Advisers and Careers Educators will progressively break down, and that a wider range of more flexible roles will evolve, both inside and outside schools. Crucial issues include the extent and nature of the professionalism that will be built into these roles, their relationship to the teaching profession, the extent to which they are conceived as professional roles on a par with teachers, and the level of resourcing and influence that is accorded to them by schools.

5. Key policy questions

The situation continues to develop in a highly dynamic way and it is likely that we remain some way from a stable situation. It is possible to run all sorts of counter-factuals about the likely end-point. On one hand, it is possible that universal career support will simply vanish for the majority of young people; on the other, it is possible that the new arrangements will provide a platform for young people to access high-quality career support in new ways that are both efficient and effective. The most likely outcome is somewhere between these two poles. Current evidence, as presented in this paper, leans strongly towards the former end; the ensuing policy questions are designed to help steer the situation, as much as possible, towards the latter end.

5.1. Government

- Could Government commission and/or publish some market research and business modelling to indicate the likelihood of schools taking up the slack left by the collapse of Connexions? Crucial to this is modelling the impact on services at various levels of funding.
- If career support services for young people are to be managed through a market mechanism, is there room for further consideration of how that market is framed and organised, and for a broadening of understanding about who are the consumers within it?
- How far does the Government see itself as having a duty to quality-assure the market or even to provide guidance to schools on what good practice might look like?
- Should the Ofsted inspection framework include a clear rubric on this element of schools' work?
- Does the Government have an idea of what market failure would look like in this area? Is there any willingness to reframe the market mechanism if such a failure occurs?
- How will the policy be evaluated to examine its impact?
- What is the role of the National Careers Service in relation to the delivery of careers services in schools? Linked to this is the question posed by Unison et al. (2011): is the NCS a "strategic body" or a "delivery body operating in competition with other careers service providers"?
- What is to be the relationship to the NCS of remaining Connexions face-to-face services for young people?

5.2. Local Authorities

- Do Local Authorities wish to develop a paid offer to deliver career support services in schools? If so, what should it comprise?
- If not, could they support schools in the procurement, management and quality assurance of externally provided career support service; and if so, how?
- How will Local Authorities successfully manage the tracking of young people and collecting the information for the proposed destination measure, with a considerably diminished infrastructure?

5.3. The careers profession

- Should some modelling be done to assess the potential reduction in overall workforce size and what the demographics of that reduction might be in terms of qualification profile, salary, experience and other factors?
- What is the likely impact on the re-professionalisation agenda if the workforce is both reduced in size and casualised?
- What are the implications for re-professionalisation of the changing relationships between the roles of Careers Advisers and Careers Educators?

5.4. Schools

- What level of inspection/scrutiny can schools expect in relation to the career support services that they deliver?
- Do schools continue to attach importance to careers education as a curriculum requiring pedagogic leadership, or do they view careers work as a set of activities requiring administrative support?
- What is an appropriate and viable level of funding for schools to provide for career support?
- Is it possible/desirable for schools to seek to resource their career support with new/additional funds? If so, from where?

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