

# New research questions government's policy on youth careers

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The lack of strategic planning by the Government in managing recent changes in careers services has been criticised by international experts in career guidance at the University of Derby, in a new report to be published today.

Entitled "Careers Work with Young People: Collapse or Transition?" the report explores how local services across England have been affected by Government policy and changes to the Connexions service.

Here is how the Times Educational Supplement reported the news: [www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6107491](http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6107491).

Recent [Government policy](#) has moved responsibility for supporting young people's careers guidance to schools, while funding cuts have resulted in the collapse of the existing Connexions service in many areas.

The proposed National Careers Service is set to focus strongly on adults, leaving young people with a postcode lottery in careers support dependent on the decisions made in schools and [local authorities](#).

While there has been outcry about the changes coming from the career guidance sector and from employers and trade unions, until the publication of the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) report there has been little clarity about the impact of the Government's policy and how services were being affected.

The new report draws together evidence from 146 local authorities (96% of the total number) to provide the most comprehensive picture of job losses, service restructuring and corresponding impact on young people.

The report authors Dr. Tristram Hooley and Professor Tony Watts say confusion is rife about what the future holds for careers services. The authors have calculated that more than 2,600 jobs will be lost in the careers guidance sector. The changes in Connexions services have included:

- staff reductions in at least 105 local authority areas.
- closure of Connexions offices in at least 50 local authority areas.
- reduction of universal careers services in at least at least 65 local authority areas.
- 40 local authorities developing plans for schools to buy into.
- 13 local authorities working to sustain universal career guidance.

The authors write: "The decision to make cuts to young people's services is only one part of the story - equally important has been the lack of any national transition plan for managing 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 a range of different sites. At present, no publicly visible plan exists to indicate how this messy interim situation will be resolved."

Dr. Hooley and Professor Watts suggest a range of policy questions which need to be resolved by four key parties - Government, local authorities, the careers profession and schools.

One of the most searching questions seeks to determine the role of the

National Careers Service in relation to the delivery of careers services in schools: clarifying whether the NCS is a 'strategic body' or a 'delivery body operating in competition with other careers service providers'.

The report says the lack of national transition planning has led to confusion, with local stakeholders wrestling with the policy decisions. For example, there have been disputes in south London about who holds responsibility for employing and making careers guidance staff redundant.

It says many schools are unclear about the changes and over suddenly being allocated responsibility to procure a service they had previously received free of charge. It seems likely that most schools will allocate much less resource than previous provision, adds the report.

The academics say that there is a need for Government to play a stronger role in shaping and coordinating the implementation of the new arrangements across the country. There is also a need for the Government to rethink its policy in this area, to ensure that all young people are able to access high quality careers services.

Information quoted in the ICeGs report has come from a wide range of sources including Unison, the Institute of Career Guidance, Careers England, internet traffic related to key words including 'Connexions cuts' from the last year, the academics' blogs and an online forum for local authority participants on the topic of careers guidance.

ICeGs is a key opinion former across the careers guidance sector offering its expertise to individuals, organisations and decision makers. Skills Minister John Hayes delivered a video address about the changes in the sector at the centre's annual lecture in June 2011.

Provided by University of Derby

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