Westminster Employment Forum Keynote Seminar: Thursday 13th October

Reforming Careers Advice and Guidance in England

A Response

At every turn my profession, which I take very seriously, is termed ‘a disaster’, described as ‘patchy’ at best, with little recognition given to the many hardworking, superbly effective practitioners within the sector. However, no-one seems to be taking responsibility. In fact, the position we are now in surely results from government policy from the last 15+ years where systematic dismantling of any effective careers work has been implemented. We are continually faced with the ‘when I was at school…’ anecdotes from a time when careers advice was a token gesture given by a reluctant teacher with little or no expertise to justify this stance. To qualify as a guidance practitioner the level 7 post-graduate Diploma and professional qualification are a good benchmark to adhere to and would ensure a universal standard throughout the profession. Many university courses have disappeared due to lack of demand following the demise of Connexions. Prior to Connexions, Careers Advisers worked closely with local employers which is straightforward good common sense; many still do and do not require assistance form the plethora of organisations who claim to be able to provide effective links with business. Employers certainly do have a role to play in giving advice in schools but they cannot give impartial comprehensive advice about all options tailored to an individual: an adviser can. The job of an adviser is not a ‘bolt on’ extra for an already overworked teacher. It is a demanding, challenging, multi-faceted role which needs to be brought in from the side lines where it has effectively been parked. Information and advice should not be separated from guidance as the three aspects should complement each other and guidance delivery correlate with an effective careers education programme within a school context. A practitioner with responsibility for all three can deliver a comprehensive, timely and efficient programme. It also needs flexibility and accessibility to recognise that young people will only absorb advice, however beneficial, when they are individually ready for it. What of adults who cannot afford to pay considerable sums for one to one careers guidance? Surely providing effective assistance for this sector is an investment we would all benefit from, particularly as it is now an expectation that we will all change careers several times within our working lives.

One significant concern is how to restore confidence in a profession that has been widely denigrated by the media and politicians to a point where young people would rather take advice from their friends. A qualification standard would help with this together with a pay scale which recognises the level of expertise required. Sir John Holman mentioned in his talk on Thursday that as well as an adviser there should be a ‘lead’; however this position does not need to be two separate people in my experience, this position can be entrusted to one, properly qualified careers professional who can pull all the strands of effective careers practice together, who could and probably should, be included in a school’s management team to ensure that careers are firmly embedded in the curriculum.

As we all know good, effective careers guidance underpins an economically successful society – surely something every government plans for and individuals aspire to. In my opinion, careers advice and guidance is not just for the few; it is essential that it is openly accessible to all.

S Armstrong 18/10/2016