

Whatever next?

From September 2012, schools will be legally required to secure impartial careers guidance for students. Helen Bates explores what this means for educators and pupils alike...

It's becoming increasingly important for young people to receive the 'right' advice. In the UK, they are facing a host of challenges including rising youth unemployment and expensive tuition fees, thus making it even more important for them to make clear and informed decisions about their future. So what are the government's plans for supporting young people, and how will this affect schools?

For a number of years, young people have received advice and guidance on their future from guidance providers such as local authorities and Connexions services. This will change now as government plans reveal that the provision of careers guidance will become the responsibility of schools. This raises questions such as, what do schools need to do? What are their duties? And what support is available to them?

What do schools need to do?

The Education Act 2011 places a new duty on schools in England to ensure that they secure impartial careers guidance for students. This duty will become a legal requirement from September 2012. Many areas have already witnessed a substantial decline in the services provided by local authorities and Connexions services, highlighting the changes that are afoot for the provision of careers guidance.

The new legal duty to secure impartial guidance will require schools to provide careers guidance for Years 9, 10 and 11. Although schools may choose how to deliver careers guidance, they must ensure that:

- Careers guidance is impartial and independent
- All students are provided with information on all post-16 education and training options
- Each student is provided with guidance that is in the student's best interest
- Guidance provided comes from a source external to an individual employed by the school.

There are a number of ways for schools to meet their statutory duty, including face-to-face

guidance, telephone or web-based services. With the new National Careers Service scheduled to be operational from April 2012, there will also be the opportunity to buy in services from a range of suitable providers. The government has stated that it will issue guidelines to support schools in assessing the quality of provision on offer.

Improving schools' performance

Whilst the new statutory duty to provide career guidance for students does not include post-16 year olds, the government is introducing new destination measures. Schools will be measured on how well their students progress from Key Stages 4 and 5, making the guidance they receive at school even more critical to their progress and what 'destination' they will arrive at, post-16.

2013 will also see the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) come into effect as current Year 9 students will have to continue in education or training until their 18th birthday. This also may increase concerns about how schools will support their students in helping them make choices about their education and training options.

Impartial advice

With the new duty on schools to deliver 'impartial' careers guidance there are a number of methods that can be employed. Many schools may offer guidance through their own careers department – but they must also ensure that pupils can access a source of advice that is independent and external to the school.

Many schools support students with online tools or resources that provide career ideas and information. This option can provide the impartiality that a school must deliver but the quality of the resource must also be considered to avoid the risk of inaccurate information. High quality online resources can support any face-to-face guidance that may already be provided by the school and are usually very cost-effective. Most online resources will also provide a record for each student, allowing the school to monitor and measure their students' progress.



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The new statutory duties for providing careers guidance certainly signals a time of change for schools; properly implemented, they should also herald an exciting time for students, as they develop their employability skills for the future.