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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

RESEARCH BRIEFING

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A STUDY OF CAREERS EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE

Key Findings

- ◆ Most heads of careers departments produced written schemes of work for careers education. In the main there was a proactive audit by the careers departments to determine if careers education was carried out on a cross-curricular basis.
- ◆ Nearly all schools maintained a careers library, which was mainly open all day and was staffed by careers department staff.
- ◆ A sizeable number of schools invited more than six speakers from industry over the academic year with speakers from higher education being well represented within the grammar school sector. In addition, nearly all the schools in the sample held an annual careers convention.
- ◆ Nearly all work experience placements were of one week's duration with pupils being required to produce a written report on completion, although the majority of these reports were not marked or returned to the pupils. Perceptions of work experience were positive.

- ◆ The key people that influenced pupils' choice of subjects were parents, careers teachers and careers officers. Factors such as the desire to obtain a good grade, and interest in the subject, were also reported to have a strong influence on subject choice.
- ◆ Pupils' perceptions of the effectiveness of guidance interviews were very positive.
- ◆ Not all pupils underwent Personal Career Planning. There was a general lack of assessment of Personal Career Plans. Fewer than half of the pupils in the study reported investigating the required number of occupational areas. The influence of career planning on decision-making appeared to be limited.

INTRODUCTION

1. The main aim of this study was to carry out an analysis of the existing levels of provision of careers education and guidance in light of the most recent models of good practice.

FINDINGS

Careers Departments

2. The organisation of careers departments appeared to be planned in a systematic manner. The results showed that the majority of careers teachers attended Head of Department meetings with other Heads of Department from across the school.
3. In addition, the majority of careers teachers had a written scheme of work for careers classes; however a sizeable number did not include the teaching and learning methods within their schemes of work. The majority of respondents rated the support they received from senior management as excellent or good, which would suggest that senior management supported the work of the careers department.
4. Pupils had the opportunity to attend a timetabled class for careers education within a variety of options:
 - ◆ as a weekly or fortnightly class;
 - ◆ as a separate module; or
 - ◆ integrated into Personal and Social Education (PSE).
5. Within years 11 to 14 careers education was provided as a weekly timetabled subject, whereas in year 10 careers education was integrated into PSE.

6. The careers department may also carry out a curriculum audit to determine if careers information is being provided within other departments. The majority of schools carried out an audit, using a checklist.

Careers interviews

7. A proactive approach was taken to interviewing pupils at key points of the curriculum, with all pupils undergoing a compulsory interview in years 10, 12, 13 and 14. The main conclusion in relation to interviewing was that Careers Officers from the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) were more involved in the interviewing process in secondary schools than in grammar schools.
8. A sizeable number of schools kept records of the interviews held with pupils, however nearly two-thirds did not keep cumulative records on the pupil interviews. There was a positive perception of interviews by the pupils. The majority agreed that interviews were a motivation to carry out research into possible career options, and three-quarters of the year 12 pupils expressed confidence in the advice given within the interview situation.
9. There appeared to be a partnership relationship between the careers teacher in school and the Careers Officer from the T&EA, with just over half of the schools reporting that they discussed written records with the T&EA Careers Officer.

Guest speakers and careers conventions

10. Another planned approach taken was that of inviting guest speakers from a range of backgrounds to speak to pupils. Speakers were invited from industry, further and higher education and training organisations. The most commonly adopted approach for selecting invited speakers was that of matching pupils to occupations/courses, whilst the second most popular means was relying on those who simply had an established presentation programme for schools.

11. The pupils rated these talks as fairly useful. Almost all schools held an annual careers convention with just over half availing themselves of the careers conventions backed by the Northern Ireland Business/Education Partnership. The majority of pupils attended these careers conventions - particularly those in year 14 - and there was general agreement that pupils were well prepared for these conventions.

Work experience

12. There was a different pattern of work experience in secondary schools and in grammar schools. Most secondary schools provided their pupils with work experience in year 12, whereas the overwhelming majority of pupils in grammar schools undertook work experience in year 13. In addition, no grammar schools provided work experience in year 14 whilst almost half of secondary schools provided this.
13. Job shadowing was uncommon in year 12, the year most frequently used by secondary schools for work experience, and job shadowing was more common in grammar schools than in secondary schools. The pupils' feedback was positive about preparation for, and follow-up of, work experience. An interesting finding was that year 12 pupils felt that they were more adequately prepared and there was a better follow-up than the pupils in year 14.
14. The majority of pupils felt that work placement was relevant to their career and also found it interesting. A valuable indicator in terms of work experience is whether or not pupils were required to provide a written report and if the reports were assessed and returned to the pupil. Nearly all schools required pupils to compile a written report, but fewer than half marked and returned the reports.

Personal Career Planning

15. Almost all schools carried out Personal Career Planning. An important element is whether the plans are assessed and marked and returned to the

pupil. Nearly two-thirds did not assess Personal Careers Plans, with a few only assessing summative accounts. Only a small number of pupils brought their Personal Career Plans to their interview.

16. The guidelines set out by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) state that at least three occupational areas ought to be researched as part of Personal Career Planning, however this was carried out in less than half of the schools, with a sizeable minority of pupils only researching one area. In addition, the majority of Careers Officers from the T&EA did not contribute to Personal Career Planning.

Service Level Agreements

17. There appeared to be a co-ordinated approach to Service Level Agreements, with all but one of the schools making a Service Level Agreement with the T&EA; however just over half of the respondents suggested that the Service Level Agreement had made no difference to the quality of partnership between the school and the T&EA.
18. A number of respondents felt that the Service Level Agreement had contributed to short and long term planning, thus relationships and processes had become embedded over a period of time. This is further substantiated by the result that the majority of respondents disagreed that Service Level Agreements were used simply to record arrangements.
19. The Careers Officers from the T&EA felt that Service Level Agreements had contributed to an increased awareness of the schools careers programme. Careers Officers also felt that Service Level Agreements did not contribute to a higher quality partnership, leading to the conclusion that they simply formalised pre-existing arrangements between Careers Officers and schools.

Influences on subject choice

20. Within years 12 and 14 a large majority of pupils perceived the influence their parents had over subject choice as important. A sizeable minority

rated friends' influence as important. In addition the results suggest that the careers teacher had an important formal role in the subjects chosen.

21. The influence of the Careers Officer was almost on a par with that of the careers teacher, with year 12 pupils suggesting they had more influence than the year 14 pupils. This may be because the Careers Officer did not have a major role to play: pupils may have received their guidance on next stage progression to higher education from the careers teacher.
22. Careers conventions appeared to have less influence than careers teachers in pupils' selection of subjects to study. The desire to achieve good grades, and interest in the subject, were reported as the main motivations to select a subject for study. In addition, their future career aspirations also had an important influence.
23. The desire to be with friends, and the absence of available alternatives, were of least influence. When asked about the subject choices they had made, a sizeable proportion of pupils in year 12 and year 14 indicated that they were not completely happy with the subject choices they had made.
24. Over half of pupils in years 12 and 14 found their careers classes helpful. Likewise a majority indicated that teachers in other subjects informed pupils of the specific jobs within those areas.

Careers libraries

25. Nearly all schools reported having a careers library. In addition, the access appeared not to be limited to any specific time of the day with over half reporting that it was open all day to allow for pupils in years 13 and 14 to make use of it during study periods.
26. Almost all of the pupils were aware that a careers library had been provided in the school, although a pattern emerged in terms of access. Nearly half of the year 12 pupils suggested that they had continuous access; this figure rose to over three-quarters of year 14 pupils. The careers library facility

appeared to be well organised and maintained as the pupils were very positive about the facilities.

27. The majority agreed that they had been taught how to use the careers library and that material was well organised and easy to use, however a sizeable proportion suggested that the library needed to be staffed more regularly than it was. A large number of both year 12 and year 14 pupils suggested that there was not someone in the library to answer their questions.

METHODOLOGY

28. As well as a comprehensive literature review of careers education and guidance, the project consisted of four studies:

- ◆ **Study One** involved a face-to-face survey with the Head of Department for careers in each of the sixty sampled schools;
- ◆ In **Study Two**, a self-completion questionnaire was administered to a cohort of pupils in years 12 and 14. A total of 1,520 questionnaires were completed;
- ◆ **Study Three** consisted of a face-to-face interview with the Careers Officer from the T&EA with the corresponding schools; and
- ◆ In **Study Four**, a self-completion questionnaire was sent one year later to the sample of the original pupils who had progressed from year 12 to year 13 or further education. The response rate was 35% (320 completed questionnaires).

THE PROJECT

29. The project was commissioned by the Department of Education from the (then) Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College. The cost of the project was £47,139.

FULL REPORT

30. The full report entitled “An analysis of the factors which influence students’ subject choice for career progression”, by Dr Desmond Hill, Dr Adele Dunn, Dr Brendan Bunting and Houston Lowe, is available free of charge from the Department of Education.

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

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