



Promoting Adult Guidance on Learning and Work

Consultation Document: *Skills that Work for Wales: A skills and employment strategy*

The response of NAEGA

NAEGA, the national association for promoting guidance for adults on learning and work, welcomes the publication of this comprehensive and timely document, responding as it does to the economic priorities set out in the Leitch agenda for the achievement of world-class skills in the UK by the year 2020.

NAEGA is a UK-wide organisation and so is especially pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the strategy for Wales, where our members organised a successful annual conference in October 2005, attracting adult guidance practitioners from all over the UK. NAEGA members have also noted the international recognition given in recent OECD reports to the services provided by Careers Wales.

More recently, NAEGA members have played an active part in the Review of IAG services in England, the outcomes of which were embedded within the *Leitch Review of Skills*, which the strategy document also addresses. It is interesting therefore to note the differing solutions arrived at in Wales and England. In the former, an integrated, government-sponsored all-age careers service is seen as the answer. In the latter, a differentiated service, with a distinct 'adult advancement and careers service' is to be established.

Although NAEGA's *raison d'être* is the promotion and encouragement of the provision of adult guidance, we believe that there is scope for a variety of models of delivery for guidance on learning, work and careers, for both young people and adults. Thus our membership includes those managing and delivering 'all-age' guidance services in Wales and Scotland, as well as those delivering services exclusively to adults in England and Northern Ireland.

In our view it is the **quality** of the service offered and delivered that is paramount, not the structures that enable that delivery. It is with this perspective that we have chosen to comment on those aspects of the consultative document that have a direct or indirect bearing on the provision of **guidance services to adults** rather than on technical questions of delivery structures and resources, or on the approaches to the wider skills and employment agenda in Wales. This response therefore focuses on the proposals in *Chapter 4: Towards Full Employment* and some of the proposed measures set out there.

The context for this response may be found in NAEGA's response to the *Leitch Review of Skills*. In particular, NAEGA welcomed:

- the principle of a universally available careers advice service for adults;
- the focus on helping all adults to take responsibility for their own career development;
- the entitlement to a free 'skills health check' for all adults;
- the flexibility of the proposed new service, to be delivered through a variety of channels and locations, including colleges and community organisations, as well as the *learnirect* telephone helpline and Jobcentre Plus;
- the emphasis on impartial advice and guidance, so that adults will be free to choose the best option for them;
- the proposal for a new, national campaign to raise awareness.

We note the scale of the employment challenge faced in Wales and the particularly pressing problems associated with worklessness in some communities. NAEGA has always advocated partnership approaches between government and all the public, private and third sector agencies working with adults, to help people develop the skills needed not only for employment, but also for tackling the learning, personal and social challenges of adult life. The availability of high quality, impartial information, advice and guidance to adults, as well as to young people, has long been recognised as a feature of a successful society as well as of a successful economy.

NAEGA is interested in the concept of the Careers Ladder and the provision of 'seamless services to customers' but is not clear how far this concept is intended to apply to adults outside the 'hardest to reach groups', as the activities described all focus on (re)-entry to the labour market and not on wider, lifelong career development as envisaged by Leitch. The need for careful and sensitive referral processes is well-understood by adult guidance workers. The availability of such an integrated and well-resourced service to the most disadvantaged is to be welcomed providing that this is not solely focused on a single point of re-entry to the job-market, and provides on-going guidance and support for all who need it once back in employment.

NAEGA recognises that the Leitch principle of a universally accessible service is an ambitious one, but is disappointed that the consultative document does not address this principle at all, and is unclear about the levels of service to be provided in future to adults other than those needing extensive intervention to assist their re-entry to the labour market. It seems likely that in Wales, as well as elsewhere in the UK, there is large number of adults already in work keen to improve their skills, which may be outdated or no longer relevant. Many of these people may be trapped in low-skilled, low paid jobs and have the aspiration, but not the resources or access to information and advice to help them make decisions about their future. The work of the Union Learning Representatives described in *Chapter 3* is important in reaching this group, but there are likely to be many adults working in settings where there is no access to a ULR. For such people the availability of a range of impartial services will be necessary, including face-to face, telephone and on-line information, advice and guidance.

NAEGA welcomes the fact that the Employment Gateway will provide individuals with information and advice on benefits, employment and learning opportunities, and will incorporate a 'skills health check'. NAEGA has already contributed to the thinking in the development of a skills health check for England during the IAG review and is in regular

dialogue with DIUS on this and other matters related to the development of the new universal Adult Advancement and Careers Service. We should therefore be very happy to contribute to similar discussions in Wales.

We appreciate the need for targeting of particularly disadvantaged groups and specific communities: NAEGA members have collectively many years of successful experience of such targeted initiatives and again we should be happy to offer help drawing, on that experience.

NAEGA notes the intention to re-examine the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance through Careers Wales and the scope for different delivery models. These are outside the scope of this response, except to make the general but vital point that whatever changes are proposed and implemented should recognise and value the strengths of the work currently undertaken by Careers Wales and its commitment to an impartial, locally available and delivered service to people of all ages, including adults. It is also essential that any changes to services offered should be underpinned by a commitment to assuring their quality and an appropriate system of initial training and extensive well-resourced CPD for those delivering the service.

NAEGA is happy to respond to further consultations and to contribute to the development of the strategy utilising the extensive experience of its members in Wales and throughout the UK.

NAEGA
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