



# **Skills Development Scotland**

## **Response to the Call for Written Evidence from the Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee**

**The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee November 2012**

## **Introduction**

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence from the Education and Culture Committee regarding Skills development Scotland UNISON Scotland has over 160,000 members, over 90 000 of whom work in local government. Within Skills Development Scotland Operations Directorate, UNISON represents over 70% of staff who predominantly deliver and coordinate the crucial advice and guidance services. UNISON members pay taxes as well as delivering and using public services and are therefore in a unique position to comment on public services in Scotland.

## **Key points**

- Staff have serious reservation about the Careers Information Advice Guidance Strategy
- There seems to be little understanding of the difference between information and advice
- A website cannot replace face to face contact with those seeking advice
- changes are being pushed through despite staff concerns about the impact on service provision
- closures of offices and staff cuts are impacting on the level of service in a period of increased demand due to high unemployment .

## **General Comments**

Skills Development Scotland is charged with delivering the Career Management Skills Framework for Scotland. Our members see the merits of the establishment of a national Careers Management Systems (CMS). They do however have serious concerns regarding its implementation, application and its wider implications for the current universal entitlement for the people of Scotland to high quality Careers Information Advice Guidance (CIAG). Our members are concerned changes are a response to budget cuts rather than to drive improvement in the service. Crucial face to face interventions are being replaced by web based and telephone services. Staff numbers have been reduced by about 200 hundred and offices are being closed or are operating with reduced opening hours.

The so called modernisation process has led to the Careers Service being divided in to a schools service and a post school service. The school offer is based on a “risk matrix” that classifies upper school pupils as red amber (dark & light) and green and allocates resources accordingly.

Red is currently only about 400 people nationally who have such complex issues they are not deemed suitable for support from this service.

Amber equates to around 35, 000 pupils and these are the pupils that are perceived as most at risk of not making a positive progression. They receive support between 5 – 8 times over the academic year to ensure they progress – amber can be characterised as low qualifications/statutory leaver. This is the group that Scottish Government have stated we have to focus our resources on.

Green pupils This is a group of 100,000 pupils or around 75% of s4 – s6 – The new service offer states that these pupils will be directed in the first instance to the so called universal offer; MY World of Work website . A website can provide information to those who can access and use it. It cannot provide the kind of challenge and critical thinking provided by trained careers professionals face to face. This is what will support young people to make the right choices for them as an individual. Young people in particular

need to be supported to have a realistic view of their own competencies and aspirations in order to ensure they make the right choice. It appears that despite their best attempts to colour code the upper school S4 - S6 - 140,000 school kids we now have another category known as unassigned since the careers matrix does not always match up with the categories some schools use.

Research commissioned by Careers Scotland in 2009 (Centre for Education Sociology Help Yourself: can career websites make a difference Howieson and Semple Briefing No 56 October 2011) indicated that while “ young people do indeed value self help services they also wish for personal contact and advice.” They also found that while many young people were comfortable with using the internet it is not clear that they are able to interpret the “volume and complexity” of the information available or relate it to their own needs. Despite this we now have a largely website only service for the majority of young people.

Very few pupils have registered on the website. There must be large numbers of pupils categorised as “green” who have not used the website for any information /advice in the first instance. As this is their only route to advice they will not know how to access the service if the information available from the website did not meet their needs. Assuming they have visited the site but not registered. Who if anybody is assisting them with their career plans? There must be tens of thousands of upper school pupils perceived as green in this position

Many advisers are offering careers interviews to proposed green pupils who present themselves in schools despite the pupils not registering on MYwow. They value the service they provide and will not turn people away when they seek help just because they haven't registered on a website. None the less the system is letting down young people badly.

Even if the service provision was appropriate there is no evidence support this system of classification used to allocate the resources. The new school offer is under pinned by a belief that 100000 pupils won't want or won't need face to face advice and guidance. Pupils of all academic levels still need good careers advice and guidance. University drop-out rates confirm the need for support for even the most academic of pupils.

The My World of Work Website is again seen as the main delivery method for careers service for those who have left school. The website often crashed or freezes, even the most focused of users gets put off by this. Respondents indicate that they get different results every time they use it. Members who have tested the site found that the profile did not represent what they knew of their skills and strengths. These are competent trained guidance staff, what results are ordinary users getting? Even if the site was technically functional about two thirds of Scots (and half of Glaswegians) have broadband. Closing careers offices reduces the opportunity of those without broadband to use the service.

A functioning website can provide information to those who can access it. It cannot provide the kind of guidance that most people require. Not everyone can make sense of the information available and while many people are comfortable with social media it is not the same as the kind of critical thinking, self awareness and analysis that is required to make realistic choices about your aspirations and the jobs market, training and education most suitable to achieve them. There are also many people who are not comfortable at all with the online world. 92% of members we surveyed believe the new delivery model creates a danger of clients slipping through the net. In particular there is no clear definition of who will need support and therefore be able to access the limited face to face support available.

Drop in facilities for face to face advice and guidance across the country are now being closed this is having a real impact on the quality of service being provided. Footfall figures across the organisation clearly showed that the vast majority of people who dropped into the centres and were diagnosed as needing face to face advice preferred to receive this on a drop in basis – in many instances over 80% of footfall figures - most centres operated a common sense twin approach in that clients could book appointments but we also had capacity/facility for clients to be seen there and then. Those hardest to reach clients who have the highest support needs will be the ones who suffer most from the end of the drop in service. They need support when they make the decision to seek support and are most likely to be put off by it not being available there and then.

Our latest staff survey finds that morale is very low, staff feel deskilled and that their professional judgement is no longer required. Nor is there any room for debate about how this service should move forward.

Members responded that:

“ you are basically told to put up or shut up”

And

“it has been a completely dictatorial creation of a new service delivery model which has been steamrollered into place”

There has been poor communication and information to staff about the changes. Members feel that there has been a

“‘Distinct lack of clarity and consistency in information’. The continual inconsistency has cause me stress and anxiety’

“We were asked to decide our future roles without any clear idea as what the new roles would involve”.

Members feel that the service will not deliver as promised.

One responder sated that

“MY Wow is wholly inadequate as a stand alone universal offer . It is difficult to navigate, fraught with technical problems and provides information without guidance. The assumption that more able pupils are therefore more able to make well informed realistic decisions is absurd. These pupils also have difficult choices to make and under this system will need to jump through hoops to see an adviser to help them.

Another that

“The new role is too prescriptive with the removal of professional autonomy. I am now instructed to no longer home visit any clients or take them for interview despite my professional belief that this in many instances these interventions can encourage clients to engage or make a positive progression

In an effort to find out how service users felt about change UNISON commissioned research to examine the use of career websites by s4 pupils and to measure the impact if any of the use of websites on their career management skills, taking into account the other career related interventions they have had and personal, social and educational factors.” We are therefore extremely disappointed that SDS have now instructed all staff not to participate in this research which could have played a valuable role in improving service delivery. .

UNISON therefore welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence.

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