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ECONOMIC  
AND  
COMMERCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
OVERVIEW  
AND  
SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE

## REVIEW OF CAREERS GUIDANCE IN MAIDSTONE



# Chairman's Foreword

## **Councillor Mrs Paterson, Chairman of the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Firstly, I would like to thank all officers and members of the committee, including our co-opted member for their contributions in producing this review.

I would also like to thank the many witnesses we have interviewed for their assistance and say how much their commitment and enthusiasm for the subject has impressed us.

Members of the Committee have been aware for some time of both national and local criticism relating to the perceived lack of skills of young people entering the workplace. Be this because of a lack of academic skills, a lack of understanding of what is expected or acceptable within the workplace or just through a lack of confidence in their own abilities. With this in mind, the Committee felt that it could prove useful to review what careers advice is offered to students within Maidstone borough with a view to feeding the results back to our own Economic Development department to aid the Council's Skills and Employment agenda.

Since September 2012 schools have been legally responsible for securing access to independent and impartial careers guidance to all students in years 9 to 11.

We have questioned and listened to our witnesses. Not only within the formal Committee meetings, but also informally in a variety of alternative venues.

We have sat in on a local schools Career adviser cluster group and attended the Annual Careers Fair at Detling. It was there that we were able to engage with young people, employers and professional advisors.

In conclusion it is clear that there is an abundance of careers advice out there but how it is harnessed and used seems yet to be resolved. A variety of problems seem to present themselves making full and comprehensive advice difficult to deliver.

I hope our findings will create more dialogue between the parties concerned and that Maidstone Borough Council will continue to play an active role in this important aspect in the lives of all our young people.

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# Introduction

The Education Act 2011 placed a duty on schools to secure access to independent careers guidance for their pupils. This was introduced in September 2012 for pupils aged 14 to age 16 and from September 2013 for pupils aged 13-18 and FE Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges students aged 16-18.<sup>i</sup>

Student career guidance was previously provided by Connexions, a government-funded agency, which was disbanded at a national level in 2012.

Following these changes, Ofsted undertook a thematic review of careers guidance to establish the effectiveness of the careers guidance in place; inspectors visited 60 secondary schools and academies between December 2012 and March 2013 to evaluate how well this new duty was being carried out. The results were published in 2013 in the report 'Going in the right direction.' This report made recommendations to improve the quality and delivery of independent and impartial careers guidance.

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted's chief inspector, said following the publication of the report, "it is worrying that the new arrangements are failing to provide good guidance or to promote vocational training options and apprenticeships. It is vitally important that young people have access to information on the full range of career pathways available so they can make informed choices about their next steps."<sup>iii</sup>

The National Careers Council was established in 2013 to provide careers provision for young adults in England. 'An Aspirational Nation' published in June 2013 reviewed the current careers guidance arrangements and made recommendations for Government, the National Careers Service and employers. The forward to this report by Dr Deirdre Hughes, OBE Chair, National Careers Council said: "Today's young people and adults face tough competition for jobs, yet many employers report difficulties in recruiting people with the right skills. The world has changed fundamentally over the past generation. We have seen the disappearance of the job for life, the emergence of the knowledge economy and loss of many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs to technological and globalisation changes."

Statutory Guidance followed from the Government, in the shape of its 'Inspiration Vision Statement,' published in September 2013. It set out the following key message and vision for careers advice:

- ***Careers education is about aspiration as much as advice.***
- ***Information is widely available. As well as advice, we need inspiration.***
- ***The best mentoring and motivation comes from people in jobs.***

- ***Employers, schools and colleges must do more in partnership together.***
- ***Government will help facilitate this using the improved National Careers Service.***
- ***Careers last a lifetime so we will continue supporting young people and adults to develop the career management skills they need.<sup>iii</sup>***

The Government response<sup>iv</sup> to the Ofsted report 'Going in the right direction' and the National Careers Council report 'An Aspiration Nation' came in the form of the Careers Guidance Action Plan. It set out the following recommendations to schools:

Schools should develop and implement a clear strategy for careers guidance and ensure that they make good use of the National Careers Service resources, well-trained staff, careers guidance professionals, employer networks, and local colleges and other providers to ensure that students are well supported in making decisions about their career pathways. 9

Schools should use destination data on students' progression after leaving school or transferring to Year 12 in their sixth form to monitor the choices made by students at the end of Year 11 and Year 13; schools should work with local authorities to monitor the destinations of students who have special educational needs or who are disabled.

Schools should ensure that every school governing body has an employer representative, and that the vocational route, including apprenticeships, is given equal status to the academic route, for example, by fostering greater links with employers so that young people and their parents/carers are exposed to a wider range of career options.

Schools should promote the wider range of progression routes available at further education colleges, independent learning providers, and communities and skills providers.

The following recommendation was made to local authorities:

Local authorities should ensure that all vulnerable young people are involved in a wide range of career guidance activities, so that they can make informed and appropriately challenging decisions about the next stage of their education and training.

Maidstone Borough Council is part of a two tier administrative structure. Kent County Council (KCC) has responsibility for Education. Maidstone sits beneath KCC at a district level delivering a number of regulatory services. Kent County

Council has responsibility for supporting the provision of Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG) to schools and colleges

There is a network of CEIG co-ordinators across the county. They are responsible for the network meetings within their district.

KCC produced a key document for CIEG practitioners. This was the 'district data pack'. It was designed to help schools identify where local skills gaps were and what the dominant employment sectors were in a local area. The document identified the growth sectors and areas that were not being met as a result of this by an increase in courses. These were in the following areas:

- ICT for programmers
- Accounting and finance and other business management areas
- Sales
- Logistics and transportation
- Administration at level 3

The Organisation for Economic and Co-operation & Development (OECD) is referenced throughout the National Career Council's report. It states in its Economic Forecast Summary for the United Kingdom (November 2014) that ...<sup>v</sup> Growth has been propelled by high job creation and is set to continue at a strong pace in 2015 and 2016...'. It goes on to say that 'labour productivity would also be strengthened by further structural reforms to improve loan availability, **reduce mismatches in the labour market** and further upgrade infrastructure.

Maidstone Borough Council is currently drafting the Economic Development Strategy for Maidstone 2014-2031. The five priorities of the Economic Development Strategy include:

- Stimulating entrepreneurship
- Meeting the skills needs

Maidstone Borough Council has a Skills and Employability Agenda, aligned with a greater focus on business needs and business engagement <sup>vi</sup>

The Economic Development team is developing a mechanism to maintain or support individuals into employment, and help businesses retain the correct labour required to grow in the shape of a skills exchange hub.

It reported to the Committee at a meeting in November 2014 that 'prior to the responsibility for skills and employability shifting to Economic Development, the Community Development team developed a bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government's Transformation Challenge Award. The Council has since been awarded £100,000 for the implementation of a 'Skills Exchange Hub' - a business to business online portal aiming to prevent skills wastage in the labour market. It will also incorporate an existing website aiding young people in finding suitable training opportunities'.<sup>vii</sup>

# Terms of Reference

The committee agreed that 'Careers advice in Maidstone review' would seek to achieve the following:

***To improve the provision of careers advice for the residents of the borough.***

The stated objectives of the review were:

***To assess the quality and level of provision of careers advice in Maidstone.***

***To identify best practice from elsewhere in order to improve the provision of careers guidance in Maidstone.***

## Summary

The Committee wanted to establish what quality and level of careers advice was available in Maidstone. Its focus was on the post 16 landscape. The Committee were conscious of the mitigating factors affecting young people in Maidstone and had its own preconceptions to challenge.

**Connexions** was the organisation formally responsible for delivering Careers advice. It was well known in Maidstone and in a central, Town Centre location. The organisation is now known as CXK 'a charity that helps young people and adults to develop their skills, raise their aspirations and maximise their potential'<sup>viii</sup>

The Committee considered Maidstone's young people who were NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) as its core group to focus on.

According to a parliamentary report on NEETS published on 6 February 2015, 963,000 people aged 16-24 were NEET in the fourth quarter of 2014, 13.1% of people in this age group. 'Not all unemployed 16-24 year olds are NEET and not all people who are NEET are unemployed. 61% of unemployed 16-24 year olds are NEET, the remaining 39% are in education or training. 47% of people who are NEET are unemployed, the rest are economically inactive: not seeking work and/or not available to start work'.<sup>ix</sup>

A wide range of witnesses were interviewed and opinions sought as part of this inquiry. These included schools, businesses, business forums, careers advice providers and professional bodies. The Committee was fortunate enough to be able to engage with young people themselves.

The Committee were of the opinion that young people were ill prepared for the work environment whether this was when undertaking work experience or at a later entry point, following further education. It felt that schools, especially grammar schools in Maidstone were focused on academic results and that there was a predetermined pathway to University. If this was not taken the options could be limited and lacking in long term breadth.

Whether a young person entered the job market aged 16, 18 or following University it was found that it was found that 'soft skills' that were often lacking. These were skills can include the following: making decisions, showing commitment, flexibility, time management, leadership skills, creativity and problem solving skills, being a team player, accepting responsibility and an ability to work under pressure. <sup>x</sup> These were considered the types of skills that were be transferable, providing a basic but competent level of entry into any work environment. This was reported to the Committee from a variety of sources and was echoed by the inclusion and emphasis on these skills by Barclays in its LifeSkills career programme.



The National Career's Council's report, 'An Aspirational Nation' sets out practical steps to guide schools. These steps or guidelines recognise two fundamental areas which the Committee has found to be the basis of impartial advice. They are soft skills and aspirational and inspiration advice.

Careers advice is often focused on further or higher education. Whereas the witnesses interviewed felt that careers advice needed to be more aspirational, provide inspiration and be less focused. Students should not be channelled towards a particular pathway too early. Therefore it was recognised that this approach needed to start early, in the primary school setting.

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

The Committee considered Maidstone Borough Council's role primarily as it was by this this means that the Committee would be able to influence and add value. It was therefore important to understand what Maidstone's offer was within Careers Development.

The Committee considered the Council's Draft Economic Development Strategy for Maidstone 2014-31 and its Skills and Employability agenda. The Council's Economic Development Officer was also included in a roundtable discussion with other witnesses from the career guidance sphere as part of its inquiries.

### **Mentoring**

How do we reach young people that do not have anyone to relate nor do they have or a chosen career pathway when the leave full time education? Despite the responsibility placed on schools to provide careers advice, there are young people leaving education or moving on to FE colleges with little idea about what their future may or hold, or perhaps most importantly without knowledge of what it could hold.

Visiting a local school and interviewing two young people, aged 16, the Committee were faced with two poignant examples. A student who had been part of Maidstone's Grammar School system of education which he felt had been entirely focused on academia. This, he felt, had prevented him from pursuing his true passion. He had left the Grammar School and had completed his education at a Comprehensive secondary school with a football academy. At this school he had been allowed to participate in the football academy each afternoon alongside his GCSE studies. At 16 there were no guarantees that he would have a career as a footballer but there could be a multitude of career opportunities within this field. However, it was unclear whether he was open to exploring these.

The second student interviewed by the Committee did not know what he wanted to do after his GCSEs. He was closed too to exploring the many paths available to him, through fear of long term commitment and possible financial penalties. These included apprenticeships, university and Sixth Form College. It was felt that a mentor would help the student explore possibilities, identify barriers and dispel myths.

The Committee interviewed a young person who had come via job centre plus to the council for work experience. He had completed a degree at university. However Post University he did not know what he wanted to do. He was using his work experience to explore many different options and establish what his interests were. This young person had everything to offer but what was apparent was the non-realisation of the abundance of transferable skills he was already in possession of. He was also being mentored as part of the Council's internal scheme.

***(DRAFT) Recommendations:***

***That Maidstone Borough Council engage schools in its mentoring scheme, exploring the possibility of offering direct mentoring where appropriate or training to develop a peer mentoring scheme with schools either itself or with local businesses.***

***That schools in Maidstone engage with Maidstone Borough Council via the the Maidstone Careers Advisors Networking in relation to its mentoring scheme.***

**Impartiality provides inspiration and fuels aspirations**

Impartiality in the delivery of careers advice is a part of the requirement placed on schools by the Government and Ofsted. The Maidstone Careers Advisors Networking meeting which the Committee attended consisted of careers advisors who were employed by each individual school. In order for schools to achieve the impartiality required to deliver inspirational a careers advice that raises the aspirations of their student; the focus should be less narrow. Schools and careers advisors should engage with external organisations and businesses.

The Invicta Chamber of Commerce ran a 'Young Chamber' at Maplesden Noakes School and was involved with all schools in Ashford. The cost of this was £950 per annum per school. The Young Chamber was focused on entrepreneurship and provided mentoring and developing. The programme that was in place as part of this scheme gave students the ability to fundraise to the annual sum of approximately £3,000 to £5,000. It was designed to prepare young people for the business world. It was focused on skills and conduct and was not designed to channel young people towards a particular route.

Members attended the Kent Choices Live at Kent County Showground. Described as 'an inspirational event that will help you explore employment, training and vocational opportunities'<sup>xi</sup> - the event is aimed at those actively seeking employment, deciding on your future after school, college or university, planning a return to work or considering a career change.

They found the experience extremely inspiring. The industries they spoke to, from the construction industry to the British racing and a stained glass company, informed them of the broad range of careers available within their industries. The scope of employment opportunities was phenomenal.

Understanding the earning potential of a career was highlighted to the Committee throughout this inquiry. Young people in today's society were mindful of money and it was important to them to understand the earning potential. Careers guidance has a further challenge – to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs.

In statutory government guidance published in April 2014, the following statement was made and responsibility was placed on schools, "schools should offer pupils the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills for self-employment – and make it clear to them that working for themselves is a viable option (in fact it will be necessary for many). Pupils should receive the advice and support necessary to build and develop their own jobs, and have a clear understanding of potential barriers – whether real or perceived."<sup>xii</sup>

The Committee engaged in depth with Maplesden Noakes School on this review and the school was considered to be an example of good practice for careers, guidance and the breadth of its offer from apprenticeships, developing entrepreneurial skills and working with the business community to establish good relationships with businesses and being part of the young chamber. However it was reported that Schools in Maidstone, outside the Grammar school system had difficulty engaging local businesses in providing work experience opportunities.

***(DRAFT) Recommendations:***

***The Committee found that there is a lot of information available locally. What was missing was a 'vehicle' to ensure that there could be easy access and signposting to the array of National, local, public, private charity and voluntary sector opportunities available in careers guidance and training. (statement to be reworded by the Committee)***

***That Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council work with schools in Maidstone to explore the inclusion of the 'Young Chamber' or a similar external entrepreneurial programme at every school in the district. The County and District could consider 'seed' funding the programme with the proviso that the scheme pays for itself through its fundraising outcomes.***

***Careers advice should not be not focused on academic routes only; vocational offers and apprenticeships should be given equal standing.***

**Missing soft skills?**

Young people are in possession of a variety of skills; from their studies to their own personal interests. With careers guidance often being looked at in isolation rather than considered in relation to the subject areas taught it is difficult for young people to imagine firstly the wide scope of careers available to them and secondly to appreciate the transferrable skills set they are already in possession of. They should see their academic studies as transferable skills, already arming them for the jobs market.

Businesses, those delivering careers advice, work experience and established employability schemes such as the Barclays LifeSkills placed a

distinct focus on soft skills and the need to develop social, interpersonal skills. It was found that this was fundamental and lacking. Being in possession of these types of skills and with a focus on this area; careers guidance would be less narrow and by default would help deliver the inspiration agenda.

***(DRAFT) Recommendations:***

***Careers should be considered alongside national curriculum subjects. The transferable 'soft skills' that are being learned and developed should be realised by students as part of their careers guidance in Maidstone schools.***

## **Funding fears**

It was felt that University remained a 'gold standard' for parents and young people. If the focus was on this from an early age, other options would be explored less such as vocational routes and apprenticeships. Conversely the Committee identified that a fear of debt could influence those who aspired to go to University.

In the document 'Higher Education: the fair access challenge' the following recommendations were made:

"The Commission on Social Mobility and Child Poverty should monitor the evidence on the EMA replacement closely as it becomes available, and in the meantime the Government should increase the funding level and refine the targeting. And, as recommended earlier, universities should consider providing EMA-style financial incentives for young people to stay on and succeed in schools.

The Government should provide this information [to provide guidance to schools to help them understand their careers advice duties] and support to schools as a matter of urgency and in particular it should emphasise the importance of face-to-face careers guidance delivered by impartial accredited professionals." <sup>xiii</sup>

The Maidstone Careers Education, Information and Guidance network, attended by the Committee had invited external careers guidance providers to inform it on their offer. Committee members were privy to a presentation from a company called Push ([www.push.co.uk](http://www.push.co.uk)) who offered high octane, impartial careers guidance. It was clear to the Committee that one of the main concerns to the Careers advisors was funding, which was limited. The representative from Kent County Council's Skills and Employment team offered the advisors guidance in how to 'unlock' the available funding but it was clear that there was some way to go in exploiting all avenues available. Careers guidance providers from various sectors could also provide free places or reduce the cost if disadvantaged students were considered. The qualifying criteria was claiming free school meals.

The Maidstone Careers Education, Information and Guidance network was considered by the Committee to be the perfect forum for innovation, with all the key players meeting on a regular basis there could be opportunities to combine their resources to a greater effect achieving more substantial outcomes for all involved. Chris Hare from KAFEC informed the Committee on the Careers Coach. Careers Coach was an online service used by colleges in Kent. It could tell the user what skills and qualifications you need for a chosen profession, along with the earning potential (noted as being of particular importance and relevance to young people today). It also looks at the current job availability as well as providing a forecast, whether jobs would increase or decrease in this area. It could also shows sideward progression and common, transferable skills.

Schools were not thought to use this tool. There was a cost of £25,000 per year but it was available to use on the college website, although the reports would need further access.

EU funding is available via Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This funding stream was identified by Chris Hare from Kent Association of FE Colleges (KAFEC) to the Committee, available specifically for the Careers agenda. He explained that projects were being looked into by Kent County Council.

In terms of best practice the Committee have looked towards the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and its projects surrounding 'Creating a skilled Workforce.' In particular the Enterprise Advisors project, "this new project will help create a network of enterprise advisors across the North East to facilitate closer links between schools and the business and enterprise community. They will focus on creating strategic connections with school leadership and offering access to mentoring, careers advice, training opportunities and placements."<sup>xiv</sup>

***(Draft) Recommendations:***

***That the Maidstone Careers Education, Information and Guidance network utilise 'free' tools such as the Careers Coach (via Kent colleges) and as a body focus on ways to combine their financial resources to greater effect to achieve improved outcomes.***

***That schools in Maidstone engage nationally (with Government departments and agencies) and locally (with Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council) to understand how to best to 'unlock' funding for careers guidance.***

***That Maidstone Borough Council work/lead with Kent County Council and partners to assist schools in finding a suitable project that would assist the careers guidance agenda in Maidstone that brings benefit to all schools in the district.***

## **Maidstone Borough Council's role**

In a press release from the Department for Education on 10 December 2014 the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced the creation of a new careers and enterprise company for schools. **It stated that there was a need for greater support and brokerage in this area** has emerged following extensive discussions with teacher representatives, employers and business organisations involved in careers advice and inspiration.<sup>xv</sup>

The Committee carefully considered Maidstone Borough Council's role. As part of its Economic Development Strategy and its Skills and Employability agenda there was clearly a deep commitment to employability and meeting the skills need for future employment in the borough.

The Committee asked all those involved in its inquiry what they considered Maidstone Borough Council's role to be. The conclusion was that Maidstone Borough Council should be supportive and visible. In terms of its offer it was confirmed that it should be one of a 'broker' in this area.

It was identified there could be a skills mismatch rather than a shortage, as stated in the National Career's Council's document 'an aspiration nation': "we face a significant economic challenge. We have high levels of unemployment (especially for young people) whilst at the same time employers are struggling to recruit people with the skills they need." Youth unemployment in Maidstone has fallen, as reported to the Committee on 25 November 2014 in a report from Head of Economic Commercial Development: "Total unemployment across all age groups in Maidstone continues to fall month on month, with numbers in September 2014 at 1,257 (1.3%), equalling the average unemployment rate in the South East. However, proportionately unemployment rates of 18-24 year olds within the borough remain higher than the South East average (2.2%), measuring 2.5%."<sup>xvi</sup>

The Maidstone Data Pack<sup>xvii</sup> states that public sector employment remains one of the biggest sources of employment in Maidstone (it accounts for over 26% of employment in the district). Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council as well as the NHS have a duty to themselves as well as to young people in Maidstone to ensure the business need is fulfilled. Their engagement will shape Maidstone's future.

The skills mismatch is clearly a priority in Maidstone and it is being addressed. There are mechanisms in place. Maidstone Borough Council is engaging with businesses. The Council continues to be represented on the MidKent College Advisory Committee, ensuring that information relating to skills and Qualifications, demanded by industry, are translated into the College's Curriculum offer. The Economic Development team will be increasing communication with other local education providers to ensure that courses and careers advice and guidance delivered at Secondary, Further and Higher Education levels of local need. It has two pieces of work underway; a survey to understand the skills needs of businesses and a survey of

training companies and courses to identify gaps and duplication in provision. "These projects will inform and facilitate conversations between education providers and business".<sup>xviii</sup>

***(DRAFT) Recommendations:***

***The Committee supports the Council's continued involvement in helping drive the skills and employability agenda forward in Maidstone.***

***That Maidstone Borough Council assists schools in Maidstone by addressing the preconceptions that it is only Grammar Schools who produce students with employability skills suitable for the workplace and therefore work experience placements.***

***As a caveat to all the recommendations made in the report the Committee sees Maidstone Borough Council having a 'brokerage' role and the ability to offer professional guidance...***

**Going forward**

The Committee were impressed by the Nottingham Ambassador Programme.<sup>xix</sup> This along with the Government's Big Society agenda and the Council's own adoption of this by offering staff two days a year for volunteering led the Committee to consider the following:

That Maidstone Borough Council encourages staff to use their volunteering days as part of a wider school mentoring scheme.

That Maidstone Borough Council leads locally on inspiring young people on the wide career choices that exist in the public sector (such as the arts, museum curating, town planning, recycling, policy development, ICT, project management etc.) as well as other Maidstone based industries. That Jubilee square be utilised for a careers day for this purpose.



## Witnesses

Evidence was gathered in the following ways:

### Committee meetings

- Paul Barron, Director of Kent Foundation for Young Entrepreneurs (KFYE)
- Alison King, Red Rocket Associates
- Simon Harris, Team Leader, CXK
- John Taylor, Invicta Chamber of Commerce and Young Chamber of Commerce.
- Abigail Lewis, Economic Development Officer, Maidstone Borough Council

### Informal interview sessions

- Fay Jordan, Barclays LifeSkills
- Chris Hare, Director of Development, Kent Association of FE Colleges (KAFEC)

## Site visits

- The Committee visited Mid Maidstone Careers Education, Information and Guidance network, held at Mid Kent College on 11 March 2015
- Careers officers from each school in Maidstone are invited to attend.
- Maplesden Noakes School, Careers Guidance department to meet with Su Mortley, Careers and Higher Education Officer and Sharon Forghani, Head of Careers.
- Kent Choices Live, Kent County Showground

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