

## **STEM SUBJECT CHOICE AND CAREERS PROJECT**

### **National Standards for Information, Advice and Guidance**

From April 2008, new Quality Standards apply to the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people in England. IAG covers a range of activities and interventions that help young people to become more self-reliant and better able to manage their personal and career development, including learning. The standards are intended to help raise the overall quality of provision.

High quality provision that helps young people make good decisions about courses and careers relies on a co-ordinated effort between a range of key players including:

- Teachers and tutors
- Parents and carers
- Employers
- Connexions advisers
- Other agencies

The aim of the STEM Subject Choice and Careers Project, working with others, is to help the STEM community have a more co-ordinated and consistent impact on young people's choices.

As a starting point, we would value the Stakeholder Advisory Group's comments and views on initial work on a quality exemplar for STEM careers work.

This takes the form of:

1. A description of the main opportunities and challenges for STEM choices and careers work
2. A checklist of key questions for STEM stakeholders linked to the IAG standards
3. Targeted guidelines for producing information
4. Examples of provision that address the checklist

If the overall model has relevance for the Stakeholders' Advisory Group we would refine the materials and produce additional guidelines on extended provision.

# 1. Careers Work in Action – The Challenges and Opportunities for STEM

The evolving structures and systems for ensuring effective CEIAG provision for young people presents a number of opportunities as well as challenges to STEM organisations working with schools and colleges.

Maintained schools have a statutory responsibility to provide careers education for pupils in Years 7-11 (11-16 year olds). Schools and colleges must also allow reasonable provide a range of up-to-date careers information. Later this year, a new duty will be placed on schools to provide careers information and advice in an impartial way. Schools and colleges must also provide reasonable access to the local service that provides careers IAG (information, advice and guidance) unless they are part of a 14-19 diploma consortium that has secured an opt-out.

Although practice varies, most schools provide careers education as part of their programmes for work-related learning and PSHE (personal, social and health education) and/or citizenship. Some schools provide elements of careers education through other subject teaching and their tutorial programmes. Timetable arrangements vary considerably. Tutor periods may be as short as 20-25 minutes while some events may be timetabled for a whole day. Significant career-related learning activities are offered on a voluntary extra-curricular basis, e.g. neighbourhood engineer schemes.

From September 2008, schools will be implementing new non-statutory arrangements for careers education. Two programmes of study for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE) have been developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. The Personal Wellbeing programme of study covers the social awareness aspects of preparation for careers and working life. The Economic Wellbeing and Financial Capability programme of study covers areas such as self-awareness, career exploration, positive attitudes to risk and enterprising behaviour. Schools are also being encouraged to be more innovative in curriculum and timetable design. 'Themed' learning opportunities will enable young people to address issues such as globalisation and sustainable development. Timetables will become more flexible with greater use of different blocks of time. These developments provide considerable scope for enhancing STEM subject choice and career learning.

Most schools and colleges have a Connexions Resources Centre where careers information is housed and interviews take place. Since 1991, careers information has been match-funded through the Connexions and formerly Career Service budgets but it is not clear whether these arrangements will continue in the future. Increasingly, schools and colleges are providing additional careers information online through their intranets and VLEs. Online area-wide prospectuses have been introduced to provide young people with access to the full range of information on courses in their local area.

Specialist roles in careers education and IAG are also in transition. Three years ago, the restructuring of teaching and learning responsibilities in schools led to an increase in the number of non-teachers with the main responsibility for careers. The identification of responsibilities and professional development for individuals in these posts is still a little haphazard although some schools have made significant progress in securing effective leadership and developing a team approach to CEIAG.

At the same time, new arrangements introduced this year for the commissioning of Connexions services for young people have ushered in a further period of change for schools and colleges. Connexions personal advisers are attached to schools and colleges for one or more days per week. Their priority is to support young people with problems and difficulties. This means that other ways have had to be found to meet the CEIAG needs of all young people including innovative uses of ICT and the greater involvement of school or college-based staff. Some schools and colleges have responded by appointing their own personal/careers advisers on a shared or part-time basis.

## 2. A Ten-Point Checklist

1. Are the resources clearly targeted and appropriate for the different age groups (primary (5-11), KS3 (12-14) KS4 (14-16) and post 16?
2. Is the information up-to-date and accurate?
3. Do the resources signpost young people to further information and help? (e.g. the local area prospectus)
4. Is the choice of format (paper-based, web-based, etc.) fit for purpose?
5. Do the resources challenge stereotyping and encourage inclusion and diversity?
6. Do the resources communicate information about trends in employment in terms of available occupations and growth and decline in specific sectors?
7. Do the resources directly support delivery of the STEM curriculum and broader personal, social and enterprise education?
8. Does the information include guidance about the full range of acceptable routes to qualifications?
9. Are materials inspiring and interesting for young people? Do they encourage them to aspire as well as presenting opportunities in a range of levels and roles?
10. Have young people been involved in the development of the resource?

### **3. Guidelines for STEM Organisations on Producing Information**

Careers information includes factual information (e.g. course directories), promotional literature (e.g. employers' recruitment information) and careers education materials (e.g. case studies used in a lesson on career planning). It also includes the careers information that comes through enhancement activities such as after-school clubs, taster days, courses and visits.

It can be presented in a wide variety of media, e.g. print-based (books, leaflets, posters, etc.) and audio-visual/interactive (TV, radio, video, podcast, etc.).

The following guidelines are for STEM organisations involved in the production of careers information. They are cross-referenced to the IAG Standards (in brackets).

#### **1. Information should be accurate and up-to-date (3.1)**

Organisations producing careers information need to have a checking process for verifying the accuracy and up-to-dateness of the information before it is disseminated.

Schools and colleges have a statutory duty to provide young people with access to a wide range of up-to-date reference materials relating to careers education and career opportunities (Education Act 1997). They will normally replace 'hard' careers information (e.g. employment facts and figures) annually and 'soft' careers information (e.g. occupational descriptions) after two to three years. Organisations producing new careers information need to consider maintenance and sustainability issues.

#### **2. Information should be impartial (3.1, 3.4)**

A clause in the Education and Skills Bill now passing through Parliament requires schools to provide careers information and advice that is impartial. They will normally refuse to include information created for promotional and marketing purposes in their libraries that is disguised or semi-disguised as 'factual' careers information. Young people attribute different types of authority to careers information. The test here, therefore, is: 'has it been made explicit to the young person in the information itself that it has been created for campaigning or advertising purposes?'

#### **3. Information should not misrepresent or mislead (3.4, 5.5)**

It would be quite difficult to produce totally 'objective' careers information and the results could be quite boring, but every effort should be made to represent the course, job or career as accurately as possible. Young people have a need for 'subjective' information such as other people's stories that they can weigh up or evaluate. In the case of subjective information, the same standards are relevant that would be applied to the production of a CV. It is not acceptable to mislead or tell deliberate untruths.

#### **4. Information should be accessible (2.1, 5.2, 5.6, 6.1)**

Young people can feel that careers information is inaccessible to them for a wide range of reasons, e.g.:

- It is 'unreadable' - densely written and the assumed reading age is inappropriate
- The presentation is unattractive, unappealing and passive. Active and interactive materials are more likely to engage young people

- It is not perceived as relevant to them (no images of people from the same ethnic background as themselves)
- They do not have ready access to the media or software that the information has been produced in
- They have limited literacy skills, e.g. young people with specific learning difficulties

It is good practice to:

- involve young people and teachers in the development of information – they have a better feel for what other young people want to know and how they want to receive it!
- Personalise careers information wherever possible. 'One-size fits all' careers information has limitations.
- Pilot information so that it can be evaluated.

## **5. Information should strengthen equality of opportunity and respect for diversity (5.1-5.6)**

Information that presents STEM courses, jobs or careers in a stereotypical way is likely to limit young people's access to opportunities. Careers information should challenge restrictions on young people's options and choices by:

- avoiding implicit as well as explicit stereotypes
- guarding against errors of omission, e.g. by not including case studies of disabled people
- showing people who have followed a non traditional entry route or who work in a non traditional area, e.g. men in caring situations and women in hard technical situations
- using images as well as text to promote diversity and challenge stereotyping
- avoiding 'cosmetic' gestures e.g. the token female or person from a BME background or conversely all female or BME images
- preventing the exclusion of specific groups, e.g. by arranging an industry visit to a brewery for Muslim young people
- 'mainstreaming' issues such as gender, faith and disability to ensure that information appeals equally to the needs and interests of all groups and does not demean any particular group, e.g. in relation to gender, by using images of women in 'sexy underwear'
- using gender free words and phrases in describing the jobs people do, e.g. 'supervisor' instead of 'foreman'
- designing information that raises the aspirations of all groups.

## **6. Information should be designed for use in a clear context (7.11)**

Producers of STEM subject choice and careers information should have a clear idea of the way in which the information will be used, e.g.:

- if it is to be used in a careers education context, have a model in mind of where and how the information fits into the career planning and decision-making process; and how the information can contribute to young people's career learning
- Consider providing information and/or guidance notes for those who support young people in using careers information, e.g. parents and carers, teachers, personal advisers