



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Department of Education

Report of a Survey of Careers Education in Post-Primary Schools

Inspected: 1999-2000

eti
The Education and Training
Inspectorate

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a survey of the provision for careers education in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. The survey was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in the 1999-2000 academic year and complements the range of inspection activities such as general and focused inspections, carried out by the Inspectorate. Since 1995, a series of inspections focusing on careers education in individual schools was undertaken and reports on the quality of the provision in these schools published.
- 1.2 In 1995, a report published jointly by the then Department of Education for Northern Ireland and the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) entitled, “A Review of Careers Guidance: Improving Quality” recommended that the Inspectorate should publish indicators of quality in the provision of careers education in schools and that there should be further development of personal career planning (PCP). Following these recommendations, the Inspectorate published the quality indicators in 1996 in a document entitled “Evaluating a Careers Programme” and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) published “Careers Planning for the Future” which contains guidance on PCP. These documents identified six core components of pupils’ entitlement for careers, and focused the work in schools on the quality of the component parts which contribute to careers education.
- 1.3 This survey was undertaken after four years of implementing the measures recommended in the 1995 report and in advance of a further review of careers education and guidance commissioned by the Department of Education and the T&EA in January 2000. Schools were selected for participation in the survey on the basis that no significant inspection activity which included the school’s provision for careers education had been undertaken in the last two years. The schools included in the survey are listed in the appendix. Although the findings in this report refer to the schools included in the survey, they are broadly in line with the findings from inspections which included careers work in the last three years.
- 1.4 All post-primary schools make provision for careers education. Since August 1993, careers education as one of the educational themes has been a component requirement of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Since 1993, schools have become increasingly aware that aspects of the career development of individual pupils are best provided outside the context of specific subjects, and most make discrete provision within the timetable to teach these. The statutory cross-curricular provision in careers education and the programme of careers

education taught within discrete timetabled time, form two of the core components of pupils' entitlement in careers education. In addition, the schools provide access to information, guidance interviews, work experience and opportunities for pupils to engage in personal career planning. These six core components are provided, to some extent, in almost all post-primary schools.

1.5 Certain quantitative terms are used in the report when commenting on aspects of the implementation of the NIC in the schools visited. In percentages, the terms broadly correspond as follows:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75-90%	-	most
50-74%	-	a majority
30-49%	-	a significant minority
10-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number

1.6 In order to provide information that might allow the Inspectorate to improve further the effectiveness of inspections, the schools participating in this survey were asked to evaluate the usefulness to them of the exercise. A copy of the evaluation form is included as Appendix 2. Fourteen returns were received - a response of 82%. All the returns indicated that the schools valued the survey visits and found them helpful in reviewing aspects of the provision for careers education in their schools. Features commonly reported as useful included:

- i. the immediate and useful feedback; and
- ii. the opportunity to focus on the quality of careers education in the school.

All of the schools which returned the questionnaire rated the procedures used in the survey as good. A few schools offered general suggestions about the survey and careers education including:

- i. the value of having explicit guidance on the content of the taught programme of careers education which might be used by all schools; and
- ii. the desirability of arranging inspection visits within a short period of time.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 This survey explored the quality of the provision in the six core components and also in the supporting structures and resources for careers education in the schools. Schools were asked for a minimum of information in advance of the survey, but all provided their timetable for the taught programme of careers education, details on the qualifications held by staff involved in the careers programme and their involvement in recent in-service training (INSET) relevant to careers education. During the survey, a team of inspectors visited 74 careers lessons and interviewed 242 pupils in groups containing up to six pupils. In addition, discussions were held with individual careers teachers, the teachers in charge of the careers departments, heads of a sample of other subject departments and with representatives of the senior management team in each of the schools. The inspectors also evaluated the quality of other aspects of careers provision in operation at the time of the survey such as industry days and interview skills training.

3. Main Findings

- 3.1 Approximately two-thirds of the schools have a written policy on careers education which is suitably linked to the school's aims and which identifies the main strategies for implementing their programme of careers education and areas for development.
- 3.2 The provision for careers education in approximately half of the schools is comprehensive and provides an appropriate range of experiences which contribute significantly to the decisions which pupils make about their future careers.
- 3.3 In approximately three-quarters of the schools, timetabled lessons in careers education are provided for each year group from year 10.
- 3.4 The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good in most of the timetabled careers classes observed during the survey. An appropriate range of strategies is used to engage pupils in relevant work and most respond with interest and enthusiasm. A minority of the individual lessons observed did not engage the pupils effectively in work which was sufficiently challenging.
- 3.5 The programmes of careers education provided for pupils enable most of them to enhance their understanding of the career options which match their aspirations.
- 3.6 All pupils who participate in work-experience, gain useful insight into specific vocational areas.

- 3.7 Pupils in schools where the PCP process is well developed, acquire useful skills in researching and evaluating careers information.
- 3.8 The development of careers education as a cross-curricular theme within the other areas of study is poor in a majority of the schools.
- 3.9 About three-quarters of the schools provide guidance interviews systematically for pupils in years 10 and 12. In almost all of the schools, time constraints prevent guidance interviews being provided systematically for pupils other than those in years 10 and 12, although most schools reported that they arrange interviews for pupils who seek additional guidance.
- 3.10 A majority of the schools provide ready access to good quality information on the careers and post-16 education and training courses available to young people when they leave school.
- 3.11 Almost all of the schools provide pupils with opportunities to gain useful insights into the world of work through well-organised periods of work experience, talks from speakers representing specific occupational sectors, mock interviews and events organised by organisations such as Industry Matters. The staff in schools work hard to assist pupils to secure suitable placements with employers and to maintain effective links with groups of employers.
- 3.12 Opportunities for pupils to engage effectively and enhance their skills in PCP are developed well in just under half of the schools. In a majority of schools, the PCP process is not given sufficient emphasis in helping pupils to refine progressively the decisions which they make about options open to them on leaving school.
- 3.13 Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support the work in careers education in about half of the schools.
- 3.14 There are deficiencies in the management of the careers programmes in about one-third of the schools.
- 3.15 All schools have effective links with a range of employers, providers of further education and training, and with organisations involved in giving advice and guidance about careers and progression routes to young people in preparation for them leaving school.
- 3.16 There are deficiencies in the provision or use of accommodation for careers education in just over half of the schools.

- 3.17 In a significant minority of the schools, the teachers who lead the work of the careers department, have specialist qualifications in careers education. The majority of other teachers involved in supporting the work of the schools in careers education do not have specialist qualifications.
- 3.18 The staff involved in careers education in about half of the schools have not attended sufficient, recent INSET courses to maintain their expertise in developments in careers education. Good INSET in ICT has been provided in the last 18 months by the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) in each of the Education and Library Boards. The information provided during INSET has not been disseminated well within the schools to develop the expertise of all staff involved in careers education.
- 3.19 Almost all schools have service level agreements with careers officers from the T&EA.

4. Quality of Teaching and Learning

- 4.1 The lessons in careers education are conducted in a helpful and supportive manner and in most of the classes, the pupils respond well to directions from the teachers. Effective working relationships are developed and maintained between the teachers and pupils. In schools providing for pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties, the staff have detailed knowledge of the pupils' needs and they take account of this in planning aspects of the careers programme such as work experience.
- 4.2 The taught programme of careers education is well-planned in most of the schools for pupils in years 10-14, and the quality of planning for individual lessons is mostly good. At key stage 3 (KS3), the main focus is on subject choice in year 10. In almost all schools, there is little work in careers in years 8 and 9 although there is growing evidence of schools beginning to plan to introduce the skills needed for the PCP process at this early stage. The work carried out in year 10, although useful in helping pupils to understand the implications of choosing particular subjects for GCSE, is seldom integrated into the taught programme which continues into KS4. This discontinuity is emphasised by the fact that, frequently, specialist careers staff do not contribute to the year 10 programme, which is often conducted as part of personal and social education (PSE) or in a form period. The taught programmes in years 13 and 14 are planned well and take sufficient account of the requirements of GNVQ programmes and the need to provide pupils with information about the process of applying for admission to universities and colleges.
- 4.3 The quality of learning in most of the lessons is good. These lessons are characterised by pupils having opportunities to engage in a range of carefully chosen activities which

develop well their skills of selecting information, exploring occupational areas and evaluating their own abilities in the contexts of specific occupational areas. The work produced by pupils in evaluating their work-experience is to appropriate standards and in most of the schools contributes usefully to the building of a data base which is used by other pupils. In a minority of the lessons, too much time is spent by teachers in giving pupils information without enabling them to develop appropriate skills in researching and selecting information for themselves. These lessons concentrate on the mechanical and clerical skills of, for example, using career inventories rather than helping the pupils to identify the skills and abilities they have developed or have the potential to develop and could apply in specific vocational areas. Although some of these lessons had the potential to be useful, they were rendered uninspiring and of little value by the inappropriate emphasis on the lower level skills and the lack of opportunities for pupils to discuss the significance of the outcomes for their own career planning. In years 12 and 13, pupils have good opportunities to explore work in vocational areas through GNVQ programmes and to understand the processes and procedures for applying for third level courses at universities and colleges. Some of the work completed by A level pupils is at too low a level; their responses are constrained unduly by some of the careers work-booklets which they complete in the school and which contain activities that are trivial in comparison to the demanding work which the pupils undertake in their A level subjects.

- 4.4 Most pupils reported that the careers programme provided by their schools had enhanced their understanding of the options open to them and had contributed significantly to preparing them for the transition from school to the next stage of their education and training. During the interviews conducted by ETI as part of the survey, the pupils were able to outline confidently the directions they intended to take on leaving school. Although most reported that the careers programme was beneficial and that they felt secure in the choices they had made, the majority stated that they would welcome more time for careers education.
- 4.5 In almost all schools, well-planned periods of work experience provide useful learning opportunities for the majority of pupils. During interviews conducted as part of the survey, many pupils cited work-experience as the single most valuable part of their careers programme. Although this perception was invariably influenced by the quality of the experience provided by employers, the preparation for work-experience, the written evaluation of the learning experience and the opportunity to give a presentation on their work-experience all help pupils to focus meaningfully on the career paths included in their options. All pupils who participate in work-experience benefit significantly from the period spent with potential employers. Work-experience provided in year 13 for pupils on

GNVQ programmes is particularly beneficial in giving them insights into the vocational area which they have chosen and in enabling them to complete assignments for particular units.

- 4.6 PCP is developed well in a minority of the schools. In these schools, the PCP process is a significant part of the careers provision for pupils in year groups 10-14. In most schools, the process of PCP is in the early stages of development, and in about half, the process is not well understood or developed. Where it is integrated effectively into the taught careers programme, the pupils benefit from undertaking research-based tasks in a wide range of vocational areas which enhance their understanding of the routes and career options open to them when they leave school. They also develop the skills of researching and evaluating information from a range of sources including information available through careers software and internet websites. This is a highly valuable approach to careers education. Teachers have not had sufficient opportunities to engage in INSET which provides guidance on how to apply the PCP process and adapt it to suit the range of pupils in their schools.

5. Curriculum, Organisation and Management

- 5.1 There are large differences in the organisation and content of the curriculum provided for careers education across the schools. At one extreme, the only timetabled input to careers education is made through a module within a PSE or pastoral programme in year 10, while other schools provide all pupils with a sustained and continuous taught programme of careers education timetabled on a weekly basis in each of years 10-14. During interviews arranged as part of the survey, the responses from pupils indicated that those who experienced a continuous programme of timetabled careers education had no difficulty in recognising the relevance of the work they had undertaken to the decision making process in choosing a career path. In contrast, where careers education was provided through either a pastoral programme in school or in form time, pupils often did not connect the work strongly enough with their future progression on a specific career path.
- 5.2 The content of the taught programmes of careers education varies widely across the schools and, in some schools, includes topics which although beneficial in broad educational terms are of relevance to all subjects and not just careers. For example, the content of the taught careers programme in a small number of the schools includes considerable time devoted to study skills and improving personal performance. The other schools deal with these topics in the context of specific subjects or as valuable whole-school issues outside the careers programme. Some schools include work on 'gap' years and financial budgeting for student

life at universities, while others do not. There is no general agreement across the schools about the content of the taught careers programmes.

- 5.3 The quality of the careers provision in schools is influenced significantly by the quality of the school's policy on careers education and the extent to which this is actively supported by the senior management team. In schools where the senior management team participates in the careers programme either in the taught programme or in interviewing pupils and their parents when key career decisions are being taken, there is generally more support for and greater awareness of the importance of careers education. In a majority of the schools, the cross-curricular provision in careers education is not managed effectively.
- 5.4 Programmes of work-experience, the organisation of mock interviews and the provision of careers conventions are well-managed. Careers teachers work hard to co-ordinate the involvement of the large numbers of pupils, employers and industry representatives who participate in these events, which are largely effective in enhancing the skills which the pupils need to make progress towards and into the world of work. The programme of mock interviews, running in one of the schools at the time of the survey, was a well-managed event. This experience, provided for all pupils in year 12, was challenging, very useful and provided an opportunity for all pupils to receive valuable, objective and detailed feed-back on their performance.
- 5.5 All schools have a member of staff who takes responsibility for careers education, either in the capacity of head of department or as teacher-in-charge. The arrangements in schools for deploying staff in careers-related work vary widely. One of the schools in the survey relied on the head of department and one other teacher to implement the taught careers programme while other schools deployed form teachers working under the guidance of the teacher in charge of careers to implement aspects of the programme. In about one-third of the schools, the staff involved do not have specialist qualifications in careers education. In most of the other schools, although the teacher in charge of careers has specialist qualifications in careers education, few of the teachers involved in supporting the careers programme have appropriate specialist qualifications and have not participated in recent relevant staff development. This gives rise to different understandings and levels of expertise in important aspects of careers work such as PCP and the use of ICT.

6. Links

- 6.1 The schools maintain effective links with a range of outside agencies and with other schools. The links with other schools are mainly in the form of shared biennial careers conventions or in participating in large careers conventions arranged every year by specific

schools. These events provide useful opportunities for pupils to gain access to a wide range of information and to discuss areas of interest with people who can give them expert advice. Most of the pupils interviewed indicated that their parents and family friends were among the most significant influences in making decisions about their future careers, and, although these influences are exerted in many cases informally, the schools involve parents formally through a range of interviews when pupils are making either subject or careers choices. Most schools provide parents with a summary of the school policy on careers and a minority involve parents in evaluating the quality of the careers programme.

- 6.2 All the schools work in co-operation with the careers service provided by the T&EA. Almost all have service level agreements which are valuable in most schools and effective in improving the guidance provided for pupils. The schools receive and make good use of the careers information provided through the careers service. About half of the schools rely heavily on the careers officers from the T&EA to provide the guidance interviews for pupils who are about to leave school. Although the working relationships between the careers teachers and careers officers are excellent, there are concerns in the schools over the lack of continuity in the service provided as a result of frequent changes in the careers officers involved with each school. There is also a perception in the schools that the extent of involvement by careers officers, which they value, is diminishing.
- 6.3 Although the schools maintain well-planned links with a wide range of employers and with institutions of further and higher education and training, there are often tensions between providing useful access to representatives of specific courses or vocational areas and ensuring that the work of pupils in their other subjects is not disrupted unduly. Generally, the schools achieve an appropriate balance in promoting these links.

7. Physical Resources

- 7.1 All schools provide access to a useful variety of careers information including printed material from a range of sources, information in specialist computer software or from visiting speakers. In about two-thirds of the schools, the access to good quality information is satisfactory. In the others the information is available only in printed form or pupils do not have sufficient access to the careers rooms where the information is held.
- 7.2 Over the last five years, the access to specialist careers software has improved and recently the education and library boards have provided schools with modern packages which have enhanced the work in careers education. Good INSET programmes have been provided through the CASS officers and at least one member of staff in each school has undertaken training in the use of modern computer packages. However, the expertise gained through

these INSET programmes in the use of ICT has not been disseminated well within the schools. The resources for using the software in careers classes are poor in about one-third of the schools.

- 7.3 About half of the schools have well equipped specialist accommodation for careers education. These schools have space for displaying careers information, at least one interview room, an office for the head of careers, storage space and suitable classroom space which is equipped with up-to-date computers and software. In the other schools there are deficiencies in some aspect of the accommodation.

8. Key Issues for Action

- 8.1 This survey indicates that there is good practice in most of the core components of careers education in at least half of the schools. There is, however, room for improvement in a number of important aspects of provision and practice. The issues summarised below need to be given priority in the strategies for improving further the quality of careers education for the pupils in the secondary sector.

- Guidance is needed on the content of the taught programme of careers education. This approach would ensure that all pupils receive at least the same minimum entitlement in careers education.
- The potential contribution of each of the areas of study to careers education as a cross-curricular theme needs to be co-ordinated and managed more effectively.
- PCP needs to be developed further to enhance the skills and expertise of all pupils.
- There is a need for INSET courses which would enable teachers to gain specialist qualifications in careers education and enable them to come to shared understandings of the essential core which should be included in the schools' taught careers programme. These courses need to have modules which focus specifically on PCP and ICT in careers.
- The resources for using ICT in careers need to be further enhanced.
- Careers programmes need to place more emphasis on the development of the skills which will enable pupils to approach key transitional stages in their careers with confidence and security.

APPENDIX 1

The following schools participated in the careers survey either through focused inspections, general inspections or through inspection visits planned as part of the survey.

Banbridge Academy

Beechlawn Special School

Faughan Valley High School

Knockbreda High School

Lagan College

Larne High School

Longstone Special School

Orangefield High

Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Knock

Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School, Belfast

St Brigid's High School, Londonderry

St. Cecilia's College, Londonderry

St Joseph's High School, Coleraine

St Mary's High School, Downpatrick

St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh

St. Patrick's Coeducational Comprehensive College, Maghera

Sacred Heart Grammar, Newry

Survey of Careers Education in Schools 1999-2000

Name of School: _____ Reference Number: _____

Please circle as appropriate.

In your view was:

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|----|
| 1. | The purpose of the survey visit clear? | Yes | No |
| 2. | The amount of information requested from the school reasonable? | Yes | No |
| 3. | An adequate range of the school's work in careers education inspected? | Yes | No |
| 4. | The survey visit useful in providing a focus for reviewing the provision for careers education in the school? | Yes | No |
| 5. | The time spent on the survey visit valuable to the school? | Yes | No |
| 6. | Was the feed-back at the end of the survey visit useful? | Yes | No |

Would you rate the procedures adopted for the survey as:

Good _____ Neither Good Nor Poor _____ Poor _____

Additional comments on any aspect of this survey would be valued and would help us as we review and develop our procedures.

Signed _____ Date _____

Please return the completed form to:

Mrs E Wells
Inspection Services Branch
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road, Bangor
Co Down, BT19 7PR

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