



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Careers Education, Information,  
Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland:  
Include Youth Briefing

13 March 2013

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland: Include Youth Briefing

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr Chris Lyttle  
Mr Fra McCann  
Ms Bronwyn McGahan  
Mr Alastair Ross

**Witnesses:**

|                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Ms Blair Anderson | Include Youth |
| Mr Neil Hutcheson | Include Youth |
| Mr Paddy Mooney   | Include Youth |
| Mr Jason Neill    | Include Youth |

**The Chairperson:** You are very welcome to our inquiry. Thank you very much for your patience. We are running a wee bit behind schedule, and I appreciate your staying on. We are joined by Paddy Mooney, manager of the Give and Take Scheme; Neil Hutcheson, the employability co-ordinator; and Jason Neil and Blair Anderson, participants in the Give and Take Scheme. It is very beneficial that, rather than just see the practitioners, we see the beneficiaries as well. I ask you to make your opening presentation.

**Mr Paddy Mooney (Include Youth):** Thank you, Chair and Committee, for the invitation. I will make some introductory remarks before handing over to Jason and Blair, two young people who participate in the Give and Take Scheme. They will talk about their first-hand experiences of the Careers Service, as well as making some suggestions as to how that service could become more effective at engaging with hard-to-reach young people. I will then talk about Include Youth's partnership agreement with the Careers Service, and my colleague Neil will come in as necessary during that discussion. We have previously highlighted the deficiencies that continue to exist in the Careers Service, including in our response to the Pathways to Success consultation.

Our comments this morning are mainly focused on models of best practice. We know that the Committee has been focused on solutions during the inquiry, so we want to share positive experience, and suggest how learning from that could be replicated more widely. I think that most Committee members are familiar with Include Youth and its work, so I do not want to take up too much time on that. I will just say that our main area of work is with vulnerable 16- to 21-year-olds, most of who are care-experienced and are classified as being NEET — not in education, employment or training — to improve their employability. The Careers Service has an important role to play in the journey of all those young people towards employment. We know that the Committee is particularly interested in

obtaining the views and experiences of young people directly, so I will hand over now to Jason and Blair.

**Mr Jason Neill (Include Youth):** I am 17 years old and live in Omagh. I have been on the Give and Take scheme for about 18 months and have found it very beneficial. I have experienced the Careers Service in a few different environments, and would like to share my feelings on each of those. I first encountered careers at school, at 15 years of age in fourth year. It was delivered by a careers teacher who was also a teacher in the school, but it was not delivered in any way professionally. I learned nothing from it. I believe that it actually confused me about where I wanted to go in my life. It was not taken seriously by the teacher or anyone in the class. It felt like a free class — a drossing session. I felt as if I was walking around in a maze and did not know the way out. The teacher did not motivate us, and I did not realise how much of a missed opportunity it was at the time.

I moved to the South West College after school for a short time, and it was there that I encountered careers for the second time. Due to the experience in school, I still did not treat it seriously enough. At that time, the careers sessions were led by two teachers, which made it better, as the students were offered more time to discuss their plans. However, I felt that the teachers were pushing me towards career opportunities that I did not want and which did not excite me. I felt that they could have taken on board the ideas that I had or the direction that I wanted to go in my life.

Following college, I have experienced careers in my time at Give and Take. In that environment, I feel that my views are listened to. My careers officer sees me on a one-to-one basis and involves me in the process and the choices to explore, and listens to what I would like to achieve. He helps me with my research and makes me aware of any upcoming opportunities that may be of use to me in my journey to becoming a soldier. He sticks with the idea, despite barriers that we may encounter, instead of pushing me down roads that I do not want to go down in case I feel uncomfortable.

If I was to employ a careers officer, the following characteristics would be very important: a casual, down-to-earth approach; a good attitude towards young people; and someone who does not force you down a way that you do not want to go. It would be better for a careers officer to come to a place where you feel comfortable rather than a young person visiting them in their office. I guess, in all of this, the biggest quality that a good careers officer would have is the ability to motivate a young person towards achieving their dream career and remaining positive despite setbacks.

**Ms Blair Anderson (Include Youth):** I am 18 years old and live in Antrim. First, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to inform you of my experience of careers advice to date. My first experience of a careers adviser was at school, and, generally speaking, it was not a very positive one, for the following reasons. The careers class was delivered by a teacher and delivered not only to my class but to the whole year group in the school hall. The teacher was very bossy, telling us what we should do, rather than asking us what we wanted to do. The approach did nothing to motivate me, as I had no input to my own career choice. The opportunity to be listened to was restricted or non-existent because of the size of the group.

The teacher focused on the high achievers in the year group, not all the pupils. The teacher could have spoken to us in a respectful manner, instead of shouting at us, and not forced us to do work that they saw as relevant to their idea of our careers. There was no opportunity to discuss the options. I gained nothing from the experience.

My experience of Give and Take has been totally different. The way the careers adviser and staff work is far better; they work with you and take the time for you; they are focused on me and on what I want to do. There is no slabbering. Although they do push you to do well, it is not forced on you. I have one-to-one sessions with my careers adviser, and I get the opportunity to look at possible options and to try different things through taster sessions. I love it, and I would like to have three years with Give and Take. The careers adviser and staff take the time to understand you and find out about your interests and skills. They also encourage you to get more qualifications, not only in your chosen career path, but in more general things such as life skills. They will tell you about the courses available and the requirements needed. Give and Take staff also work with you around careers. They support you and do not give up on you; they also allow for outside stresses.

All careers advisers should take a more informal approach, and they should have at least some experience of working face to face with young people. If there was one recommendation that I would make to you, it would be this: have careers advisers who have a youth-work approach or qualification. They should mix with young people and work informally, for example, meeting young people in coffee shops and discussing career options over coffee. That would mean that they were more likely to care

about and understand young people and more likely to stick by them when things are rough, thereby motivating them to want to be there and achieve.

**The Chairperson:** Jason and Blair, thank you for your contribution to today's session. It is good to hear first-hand from participants. You have ended up taking away from the two gentlemen between you, but your contribution has been very worthwhile.

**Mr Mooney:** Jason and Blair bring a first-hand perspective to this discussion, which we hope has been informative and helpful to the Committee. I will talk a little about Include Youth's partnership agreement with the Careers Service, an approach that we believe is evidenced by Jason and Blair's remarks, and which has significantly enhanced the careers service that that group of young people has received. Include Youth and the Careers Service jointly secured funding from the Big Lottery Fund to work collaboratively to identify best practice and to develop services for young people on the Give and Take scheme. In 2010, a formal regional operational partnership agreement offering a menu of appropriate services was developed, which ensured consistent delivery across the board for those young people. That partnership won an award at the 2010 Institute of Career Guidance annual conference.

Reflecting on the critical elements that have led to the development and success of that agreement, the following factors can be identified: support for and endorsement of the agreement from the highest level in both parties is critical to its success; time and effort must be invested by both parties in developing a shared understanding of the needs of the young people and how best to meet them; careful joint planning and development by both organisations; and regular reviews and evaluations need to be built into the operation of the agreement and, with those reviews, informing strategy development at project management level.

Young people's participation in the monitoring and evaluation of the service is crucial and should be explicitly included in the agreement. Delivery of the service should be predicated on the flexibility that meets the needs of the client group. The importance of outreach work should be fully recognised and prioritised. The interest and aptitude of individual careers advisers in working with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people is hugely important. It is preferable if those careers advisers can volunteer to work with this client group, as they will be more likely to have the necessary commitment, empathy and skills.

The Pathways to Success strategy included a commitment to further develop such partnerships. Based on the evidence presented to you today, we strongly believe that that work needs to be firmly progressed. The move away from a one-size-fits-all Careers Service has helped to deliver results for this group of young people. We believe that those partnership agreements should be replicated much more widely with other community and voluntary organisations working with hard-to-reach young people. We are committed to helping those organisations to make that happen. Thank you for your attention.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much. Paragraph 3.79 of your submission states:

*"DEL should consider organising a conference on the theme of tackling youth unemployment."*

What would you bring to such a conference?

**Mr Mooney:** We would bring the voice of the young people and their experiences. We would also bring the learning from our partnership of what has worked.

**Mr F McCann:** Throughout the inquiry, many organisations — colleges, universities, schools, head teachers, teachers — came in. However, what we have been trying to get at is the impact of careers advice and guidance on young people: how it falls into the different categories of education and the importance of bringing people around. There have been two testimonies this morning, but I am also interested, particularly for the inquiry's purpose, in having more information in how the lack of good careers advice impacts on people. Crucially, the stories that we get differ, depending on who we have in here. However, you mentioned Steps 2 Success, and that always baffles me. We usually hear that a scheme such as that may have taken place in England, been tidied up a bit and put out as a new scheme here. When such schemes are being drawn up, does anybody bother talking to the likes of you? Do they say, "Look, we have this new scheme coming in? You have experience. Could you advise us advice on the best way to do it?".

**Mr Mooney:** No; that is why we use forums such as this to share what we have learned from experience. It is about trying to ensure that that learning is replicated. This partnership first happened because of a recognition that the young people with whom we worked had received no quality careers advice and guidance. We, and the Careers Service, looked at that and agreed the type of programme that we could put in place to best meet the needs of those young people.

**Mr F McCann:** I asked the question on the back of a presentation that we got from the CBI. A guy from NIE said that it had put out 50 apprenticeships a year. It was a horror story to listen to the number of young people who do not get to even the first stage of interviews. That also ties in with what we said about the fact that a whole section of young people on the ground is bypassed by the NEET strategy and by the Department.

**The Chairperson:** As part of the inquiry, there is an online questionnaire. Have you had access to it?

**Mr Mooney:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** I just wanted to clarify that.

**Ms B Anderson:** My wee sister's friend's school recently had a careers day. That wee girl is not doing well in school at the minute due to home stuff, and the careers adviser said to the wee girl that the only place she was ever going to work was a McDonald's and that there was no point in her coming to the careers classes because of her grades in school. The wee girl has a lot going on, and that was the wrong thing to say to a 15-year-old, who then said that she was not going to finish the rest of her schooling because there was no point. That is another wee girl who is going to be left behind because she listened to what a careers adviser said.

**Mr F McCann:** I had an experience exactly like that. A young lad who lives not that far from where I do told me that he could not wait to leave school and to get into McDonald's. If that is the target that kids are setting themselves —

**The Chairperson:** Even careers advisers are talking about McDonald's now, and I hope that that comes out in the work that we are doing. Thanks for that, Blair.

**Mr Lyttle:** Thank you for your presentation; I really enjoyed hearing from you. I had a similar recent experience of hearing advice such as your friend was given. I was told to consider options that people presented as less enviable than others. Some people would say that perhaps I should have taken those rather than come here. I understand what you are saying, and it reflects a deeper issue. There are some good opportunities via McDonald's; it has almost degree-level training. Therefore, the comment is not only condescending but completely inaccurate and misrepresentative of the positive opportunities that may be available through that route.

We are uncovering all types of challenges through our inquiry, so it was encouraging to hear that the careers guidance that you get through your programme is in a format that should be delivered. You get one-to-one mentoring and guidance and are told the options, which is empowering, rather than just being forced down one particular route. I am really grateful for your contribution here today.

Paddy, are you confident that DEL is engaging with you to make sure that those programmes are sustainable? Are you seeing the types of outcomes that you would like to see in respect of achieving employment after guidance?

**Mr Mooney:** We focus on best practice, and that is why we have highlighted this partnership agreement. We know that, for many other young people, that service is not available, so we want to use whatever means we can to see that replicated.

The young people on the Give and Take scheme are those who are furthest from the employment market, but they are interested in learning. The qualifications that they attain, with the support and guidance from our staff as well as the accompanying work of the Careers Service, are remarkable.

What happens through the partnership is that every young person on the scheme gets a named careers adviser whom they meet throughout the duration of the scheme. That starts when a young person comes in for induction. The careers adviser meets them, and the information feeds into what becomes an individual action plan for the young person. Then, throughout the duration of the scheme,

the careers adviser regularly meets that young person until, finally, when they are ready to exit the scheme, an exit strategy is formed, in which the careers adviser plays their part by guiding the young person. Most of our young people move on to mainstream training; about 10% or 12% move into employment, and about 60% move into training.

**Mr Lyttle:** Progression is being achieved.

**Mr Mooney:** Yes, definitely.

**Mr Lyttle:** What do you guys hope to go on and do?

**Ms B Anderson:** I want to be a youth worker.

**Mr Neill:** Military.

**Mr Lyttle:** And you are making progress towards that?

**Ms B Anderson:** Give and Take has helped me a lot. I did a Prince's Trust course, too, which — do not get me wrong — was fun, but Give and Take supports and stands by you no matter what. The careers advisers seem to care more; they seem to have, as I said, a youthful approach. That is very important for careers advisers; they need to be on the same level as young people. Young people would resist someone who was bossy.

**Mr Lyttle:** I am grateful to hear from you today. If you ever want to come here for work experience or to find out more about the Assembly, you are more than welcome.

**Mr Neil Hutcheson (Include Youth):** May I just make a point about what came up with the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders? David, I think, talked about young people not finding employment and how they realise that it is not going to happen.

It was pertinent that you, Chris, mentioned McDonald's, because it is doing very good work around employing people. It is looking heavily at the ways in which you can employ people without having to go through the standard mechanisms of filling in an application form, which can be quite difficult, or doing an interview, which is also very difficult. It is looking at employing people as trainees for a trial period; it gets people to come in and prove themselves over two, three or four weeks. That is their interview, and, if they are successful, they get a job. I recommend that the Committee look further at that.

I know that loads of work is going on through CBI, Business in the Community and organisations such as that. Look at what employers can do within the law. A big part of it is that employers are scared. It costs a lot of time and money to find out what you can do through recruitment. Take, for example, ring-fencing jobs: if you employed, say, 10 people, could you make sure that one or two of them has a conviction or is from care? Such things could be explored a wee bit more. The Equality Commission would be the place to look at that.

**The Chairperson:** We could look at getting a research paper on that, if members are in agreement.

Just before you leave, I want to say that the reference to McDonald's was used as an example; it was not a recommendation or an endorsement. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Lyttle:** Other fast-food outlets are available.

**The Chairperson:** I think that an interest would have had to be declared at some stage.

Folks, thank you very much. Jason and Blair, I wish you well in your career paths. I thank Include Youth for the support that it has given to these two young people and for bringing them to the Committee today. Thank you very much.