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Caroline McElwee
Committee Assistant
Education Committee
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA

30th August 2012

Dear Sir/Madam,

YMCA England response to Education Select Committee inquiry into careers guidance for young people.

The YMCA is a major provider of a whole range of employment and training programmes to help young people into work. These include apprenticeships, vocational training, training courses, informal education and volunteering opportunities. YMCA Training is one of the UK's largest voluntary sector training providers with more than 50 training centres across the country offering opportunities to over 18,000 young people and adults every year.

YMCA George Williams College develops innovative programmes and resources supporting the needs of workers and managers. Courses include youth and community work, informal education and working with homeless people. YMCA George Williams College offers the chance to study at pre-qualification through to doctorate levels.

In addition to the work of YMCA Training and YMCA George Williams College, a number of YMCAs have also integrated education and training provision into their day to day work and operate as local providers. Examples of this would include the Halton YMCA Community Academy and the Plymouth YMCA Community Learning model.

Following the publication of the Education Select Committee's inquiry, the YMCA national body, YMCA England, carried out a consultation of the 121 YMCAs across England on careers guidance and its impact on young people. Their comments and feedback form the basis of the response.



1. The purpose, nature, quality and impartiality of careers guidance provided by schools and colleges, including schools with sixth forms and academies, and how well-prepared schools are to fulfil their new duty;

- 1.1 The role that careers guidance has played in helping young people's career choices has been significantly undervalued for a long time. The nature and purpose of careers guidance should always be to inspire and inform young people about what their future possibilities could be.
- 1.2 Young people should be given guidance on *all* the available routes they could take, whether through education, training, apprenticeships or starting their career immediately after school in order for them to build a picture of the future they want to have.
- 1.3 Careers guidance should instil a confidence in young people about the decision they are making early in life which will impact their future prospects. However it should also be adaptable to the transition young people move through as they mature and be ready to offer different guidance at different stages, when it is required.
- 1.4 The benefit of the duty on schools to secure independent, impartial careers guidance is that students feel significantly more confident about information advice and guidance when schools are involved in the process¹. Schools have specific targets that they have to meet in regards to how many young people progress to study in further education but impartiality must be the key when involving schools in the process of ensuring careers guidance is delivered to young people.
- 1.5 An impartial, balanced and range of options should be presented to young people so they are able to make informed decisions about what they want to do with their careers and educational futures.
- 1.6 The survey by ResearchBods in 2012 also found that 77% of A-level students said they were discouraged from studying a vocational qualification and 57% said they were presented as qualifications for someone less academic than themselves.²
- 1.7 YMCA England has concerns about the impartiality of schools being involved in the process of securing careers guidance but does recognise that young people may feel more confident about the overall process with schools involved.

¹ How do young people make choices at 14 and 16?, DfES, Blenkinsop, S, et al (2006)

² A-Level Students Research March 2012; Edge Foundation. (2012)



2. The extent of face-to-face guidance offered to young people;

- 2.1 Face-to-face careers guidance is essential in order to provide an effective and inspiring service for young people. Simply sending them to a website or asking young people to fill out an online questionnaire is not enough to give them the direction and knowledge they require.
- 2.2 Young people should be encouraged and nurtured through a process of careers guidance and this is best done through face-to-face interactions, with someone they recognise, trust and have built a relationship with.
- 2.3 The face-to-face interactions of careers guidance should not be restricted to those who deliver the guidance alone. There is a duty for more involvement from the local area, businesses and civil society. Local employers should regularly be brought in and incorporated into the careers guidance programme in order to show young people the different options which are available to them locally.
- 2.4 In a survey by Girlguiding UK, the top career choice amongst girls aged 7 to 16 was hairdresser or beautician. When asked why this was the case 35% of girls said one of the reasons was "It's all girls know about".³
- 2.5 Young people will often be exposed to only certain types of workplaces which feature around them when growing up. The involvement of careers guidance to showcase different varieties of working environments is essential in order to foster ambitions within young people.

³ Girls' Attitudes Survey 2011, Girlguiding UK, 2011

3. At what age careers guidance should be provided to young people;

- 3.1 With a growing number of young people unemployed, not just in the UK but across Europe, it is important that young people are being prepared for the realities of work from an earlier age.
- 3.2 The current careers information advice and guidance model has not been equipping young people with the knowledge they need before they reach the job market. The introduction of earlier careers guidance allows young people to appropriately prepare for the job market over a longer period of time.
- 3.3 In order for careers guidance to be most effective it should not be limited to the three years between years 10 and 11 but should be expanded to include those in years 8 and 9 (12-14 year olds). Allowing for this guidance to take place over the whole five years will give young people a more holistic approach when learning about their personal development choices and one which can be made over a longer time period.



- 3.4 No one approach will be able to reach all young people, across all age groups; therefore it is important to use multiple approaches to engaging young people in careers guidance. If the introduction of careers guidance is made at an earlier age it will help to ensure that young people will have a longer exposure to a different variety of methods to engage themselves in careers guidance. The longer they are engaged with careers guidance the more opportunities they will have to benefit from its knowledge.
- 3.5 Young people will not necessarily all experience the value of careers guidance at the same time and it will depend on their own stage of development. As such a careers guidance service which is available throughout young people's development at school is the most effective way to ensure the guidance is successful overall.
- 3.6 The current upper age for careers guidance to be given to young people is 16 years old. One of the reasons this age limit was originally established is because it is the current age at which young people will leave secondary school education. As the participation age is to be extended to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015, careers guidance should also be extended to reflect this move.
- 3.7 Research conducted by Edge in 2011 shows that 67% of academically-able young people in Key Stage 4 found it either quite or very difficult to make choices about what they will do the following year.⁴ Young people should have access to careers guidance both before and during the decision making processes which affect their futures, but most importantly, immediately before many leave their educational lives for the workplace.
- 3.8 The current job market is in fluctuation and there is no evidence to suggest that this will change in the near future. As young people leave to go into the world of work there should be provision for them to be able to access careers guidance which will be able to help them adapt or change pathways to a job market which is asking for different skill requirements at different times. When asked whether they were given as much information about vocational options as about University, 76% of those surveyed said they were either given less or weren't given any information at all, in a survey conducted in March 2012.⁵
- 3.9 There is significant pressure on young people to decide what they want to do with their lives/careers from a young age, however many of them will not have decided on what career or educational direction they want to pursue. Through an extension of the age at which careers guidance is given it allows for those young people who have not yet chosen their path to still gain the appropriate advice at a later stage.
- 3.10 Young people's personalities, interests and aspirations may change as they mature and if careers guidance is limited to just those aged 14-16 then it



could potentially miss a vital period of development for young people through their late teenage years.

3.11 Careers guidance given in these earlier years may no longer be appropriate when they reach 17-18 years old, thus raising the age level may help young people who have changed what they want to do with their lives/careers and still require access to expert advice.

3.12 YMCA believes that careers guidance should be taught in some capacity from ages 12-19 years old. Over this period the way young people interact and absorb information will change significantly depending on their age and as such so should the method in which the careers guidance is communicated and delivered to them. The depth and support needed in the later years will not be required or appropriate for those aged 12-13 years old. The careers guidance needs to adapt to the most appropriate format for the age and type of young person it is being delivered to if its success is to be maximised.

⁴ The Impact of practical and 'vocational' learning on academically-able young people aged 11-16; Edge Foundation; Richardson, W. Sing, S. (2011)

⁵ A-Level Students Research March 2012; Edge Foundation. (2012)

4. The role of local authorities in careers guidance for young people;

4.1 Local authorities not only have a duty to ensure that young people are receiving the best possible careers guidance but they also have a vested interest in the successful delivery of the service. It is exceptionally difficult for young people to be able to move around in the UK and to find work outside of their own towns and cities. As such the strengthening of careers services for young people within local authorities would lead to improved long term prospects for the local areas and the young people within them.

4.2 Local authorities should have a role in coordinating the interactions between young people, the careers service provider, schools and the wider community. This is particularly important with targeted guidance where local authorities are ideally placed to be the link in ensuring this happens.

5. The effectiveness of targeted guidance and support offered to specific groups, such as Looked After Children, children eligible for Free School Meals, teenage parents, young offenders, those with special educational needs or disabilities and those at risk of becoming NEET;

5.1 The support delivered through careers guidance should be designed to reach all young people. However those young people from a disadvantaged background are less likely to receive any informal careers guidance from their family or social networks.⁶ As such young people need to receive targeted



guidance so that they are adequately prepared for making decisions around their future.

- 5.2 This targeted service will require greater collaboration between schools, careers service providers and the local authority in order to identify the young people who need the support and also deliver it in a way which is appropriate and effective. The use of specialist key workers to assist in the delivery of careers guidance, may act as an effective tool to help those who are in need of more targeted assistance.

⁶ Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility; HM Government (2011)

6. *The link between careers guidance and the choices young people make on leaving school;*

- 6.1 The decisions made on what course options to study at school will determine the choices available at college or sixth form for young people. Similarly this relationship continues for choices made in further education affecting higher education possibilities.
- 6.2 For some young people choosing the wrong choice at the beginning of their journey can hamper their aspirations later down the line. This is particularly true in the case of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) where only studying particular A-levels will allow you onto these courses in higher education, which are required for particular jobs.
- 6.3 The *How do young people make choices at 14 and 16?* report found that young people did not make the link between careers guidance and the personal decisions they were making quickly enough. The link and importance between the choices made and future options must be emphasised to young people. One way to resolve this problem is to start young people's engagements with careers guidance at a younger age.
- 6.4 If careers guidance is delivered at a younger age, it will allow for the full scope of options available to be explored by young people and for them to be able to see the direction in which particular pathways will take them.

7. *The overall coherence of the careers guidance offered to young people.*

- 7.1 The need for accurate and up-to-date local information could not be more important when discussing careers guidance. Given the inability of young people to be able to move around the country to find work, there must be an emphasis on what is available in the local job market.



- 7.2 This may be more difficult when delivering careers guidance to a younger age group but must be more significant in the years directly before entering the workplace. Without relevant knowledge of what is available locally, young people may face barriers into work immediately when leaving education and training if the jobs are not available.
- 7.3 The responsibility to deliver careers guidance to young people should not just be delivered through schools alone; there is a role to play for everyone who impacts on a young person's life. In order to support a holistic approach to careers guidance there needs to be more support for parents/carers in particular to be able to offer careers guidance where and when they feel it is appropriate. Access to information should be made available to parents/carers including adequate resources in order for them to play their part in shaping the decisions around a young person's future.
- 7.4 Careers guidance should be accessible across all media platforms which reflect the digital competencies of the young people receiving it. The resources and information available should be adaptable and accessible for all ages when it is appropriate. This allows for young people to have a greater opportunity to access the information in a format that they are comfortable with.

Yours faithfully,



Ian Green
Chief Executive

