

Terms of Reference

Independent Research Review of Careers Guidance Delivery 2021

The Economy and world of work are changing at a rapid pace and it is crucial that we take bold steps to ensure citizens of all ages have access to the services they need in order to make informed career decisions and fulfil their potential, which in turn will provide a supply of skilled people to our local employers. The new Skills Strategy, ‘*Skills for a 10x Economy*’ sets out the long-term vision for skills development in line with our economic ambition and there are a number of key priorities for workforce skills within the strategy’s key commitments.

The Department will be setting out the Ministers Vision for the wider skills and careers system with a clear action plan on the priorities that we must take forward now. To progress the commitments relating to the delivery of careers guidance, we propose to commission a short, focused research project to inform priorities within the Skills Strategy and help shape careers provision. The overall aim is to research new and innovative approaches and to acquire new knowledge to improve the delivery of careers services. It will examine international best practice and explore creative solutions which could build on existing provision and policies.

The research will be undertaken by Dr Deirdre Hughes, a world-renowned expert in careers and skills. We have confirmed that the scope and purpose of the project is defined as research. The final report will also be of value to DE and will be published.

Dr. Hughes has carried out research reviews across the world and recently in Wales for the Welsh Government and for Skills Development Scotland. These reviews included a ‘return on investment’ analysis and we would propose to include a similar exercise in our review.

Dr Hughes is a policy adviser, academic researcher/writer, trainer and freelance consultant specialising in the impact of careers, employment and skills policies to support the development of jobs and growth.

She is a Principal Research Fellow at Warwick University's Institute for Employment Research and an Associate at the Centre for Educational Sociology, Edinburgh University. Dr Hughes was awarded an OBE in 2012 in recognition of her services to career guidance. She has reviewed the Scottish, Welsh, English and Irish careers systems extensively over the years, and is frequently asked by senior Whitehall Ministers and countries across the world to provide independent advice and opinion on careers matters.

Her credentials are unique, world recognised and exemplary, reinforcing the justification for her selection for this short, time bound, focused piece of work.

1. Focus Groups

Dr Hughes will take account of information from four specific focus groups;

- young people,
- those with disabilities (physical and learning),
- the needs of adults, and
- employers.

2. Secretariat

Dr Hughes will be supported by officials from DfE Careers Service. To ensure independence this support will only be secretariat in nature and officials will have no role in the undertaking of any research or communication with stakeholders. Meetings will be held when required, with regular communication conducted in the main through virtual discussion (WebEx). It is intended that Dr Hughes will meet early in the process with the Careers Advisory Forum (CAF).

3. Timescale

The review will be undertaken over a 12-14 week period starting in November 2021. The final report, including recommendations, will be completed by Jan/Feb 2022. The final report will be shared with the Minister and CAF for consideration. It will also be shared with key stakeholders including the Department of Education who have confirmed they will use the report findings to inform future delivery of school careers

provision. The report will also be shared with Trade Union and discussions/consultation carried out prior to recommendations being implemented.

4. Scope

The research will examine how careers provision can be improved to deliver against the vision set out in '*Skills for a 10x Economy*'. In particular, the provision of careers guidance must reflect the needs of a modern vibrant and dynamic 21st century economy in which all individuals regardless of age, aspiration or ability, as well as key influencers such as parents and teachers, have access to independent, high quality careers advice which helps them to maximise their potential and contribute to their community and the NI economy.

The review will gather both qualitative and quantitative evidence including consideration of the impact, mode, timing, prioritisation of careers guidance provided by the Department's Careers Service. The main requirement is for a package of work to research the current status of careers provision across Northern Ireland, building on earlier findings. It will undertake research to identify the scale and consistency of careers information, advice and guidance, resource and activity in schools, colleges, vocational education and training, drawing on information gathered by the Careers Service and undertaking additional surveys, focus groups and telephone interview activities and analysis.

The research will be carried out via a range of methods including, a desktop study to map/audit careers provision in the above-mentioned constituency groups, a number of online surveys, focus groups across Northern Ireland and telephone interviews with key stakeholders, drawing on the significant experience and expertise of Dr Deirdre Hughes (Programme Director) and Senior Associate colleagues.

The review will also include:

- a high level of engagement with education and business, and
- engagement with Trade Union side who represent careers staff.

5. Aims and Outcomes

There are two main aims (i) the short term urgent work to innovate – establishing a new delivery model; and to inform the development of a wider careers and skills portal and (ii) longer term – to build on collaborative working with stakeholders to ensure a flexible careers system capable of delivering key messages to clients at all stages of their life.

The deliverables expected from the project are as follows:

External research project of careers delivery by world renowned expert to include:

- Complete evaluation of current service delivery, funding, service offers and performance across a range of stakeholders.
- Review, research and make recommendations to improve the timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency of career interventions to deliver against the expectation of stakeholders, service users and the policy intent.
- Review and research targeting of career services and identify any gaps in service provision.
- Benchmarking (worldwide) with other careers providers.
- Recommendations and operating model for delivery of best practice from across the world.
- Recommendations for consideration by Minister and Careers Advisory Forum.