

The Youth Employment Service— Why, What and How

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In Great Britain, at the beginning of this century, it was felt that, as a natural corollary of the greatly increased public expenditure on education, provision should be made for young people and their parents to receive information and advice about the types of employment in which that education might best be used. This feeling led to the passing of two Acts of Parliament, the Education (Scotland) Act, 1908 and the Education (Choice of Employment) Act, 1910, which empowered Local Education Authorities to make arrangements for giving boys and girls assistance with respect to the choice of suitable employment by means of the collection and the communication of information and the furnishing of advice.

In Scotland, the powers of Education Authorities in this field remained the same for forty years, but, in England and Wales, the scope of the service Local Education Authorities were empowered to provide was gradually increased until their responsibilities included not only vocational guidance and placement but also the administration of unemployment insurance in respect of young people under 18 years of age. Where the Local Education Authority chose not to exercise these powers, the service was provided initially by the Board of Trade and subsequently by the Ministry of Labour.

Despite this theoretically complete coverage of Great Britain, the service provided varied considerably in effectiveness from area to area and, in 1945, a committee was set up under the chairmanship of the late Sir Godfrey Ince "to consider the measures necessary to establish a comprehensive Juvenile Employment Service and to make suggestions for a practicable scheme." Its main recommendations were embodied in the Employment and Training Act, 1948 which, amongst other things, extended to Education Authorities in Scotland the same powers in this field as those exercisable by Local Education Authorities in England and Wales.

As a result of this Act, Local Education Authorities now provide the Service for some 85% of the total population of Great Britain, the

Service in the remaining areas being provided by the Ministry of Labour. Another result has been a very considerable development in the work of the Service. Helped both by a more enlightened outlook and by a reduction in the pressure of insurance work due to the more favourable employment situation, much greater emphasis has been placed upon the primary function of vocational guidance and substantial improvements have been made in the service provided for older school-leavers.

In Northern Ireland, Section 56 of the Education Act (Northern Ireland), 1947 empowered Local Education Authorities to set up a vocational guidance service but the function of placement remained with the Ministry of Labour and National Insurance. The powers granted were similar to those granted to Education Authorities in Scotland in 1908 and only the Belfast Education Authority chose to exercise them. The division of responsibility was the same as that which had been abandoned in England and Wales, following the Chelmsford Report of 1921, as having proved to have been unsatisfactory.

In May 1957, the Minister of Labour and National Insurance set up a Committee of Enquiry under the chairmanship of Lord Coleraine "to examine vocational guidance and youth employment services for young persons under the age of 18 in Northern Ireland, and to recommend such changes as may be required to meet local needs and conditions." This Committee reported in October 1958 and recommended the establishment of a comprehensive Youth Employment Service for young persons up to the age of 18 under similar arrangements to those operative in Great Britain with the exception that, throughout the Province, the administration of unemployment benefit and assistance grants should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour.

When its recommendations were embodied in legislation, however, instead of empowering Local Education Authorities to provide the Service, the Youth Employment Service Act (Northern Ireland), 1961 provided for the setting up of a statutory board which would be responsible for the establishment and development of a comprehensive Youth Employment Service throughout the Province. The Northern Ireland Youth Employment Service Board, set up early in 1962, is composed predominantly of educational interests having, amongst its 33 members, 18 representatives of Local Education Authorities, 2 of governors of voluntary grammar schools, 3 teachers, 1 from each of Queen's University and Magee University College, together with 3 employers, 3 employees, 1 representing youth organisations and 1 from the Churches' Industrial Council. Local Education Authorities also have a financial interest in the Service in that 20% of the approved expenditure is found by the eight County and County Borough Councils.

in proportion to their gross aggregate rateable value, the other 80% being met by the Ministry of Labour

The major functions of the Northern Ireland Youth Employment Service are threefold. The first, and by far the most important, is that of offering an opportunity of receiving vocational guidance to all boys and girls as they approach the time when they will leave school. The second is to assist young people to secure the most suitable employment available, and the third is to review the progress of young people up to the age of 18 years to help them to settle down in employment and to make progress therein.

As already stated, the Service in Great Britain is also responsible for the administration of National Insurance and National Assistance, whereas in Northern Ireland these duties will be carried out by the Ministry of Labour. There are advantages and disadvantages in both systems. Increased pressure of insurance work due to heavy unemployment, which may be both severe and sudden, requires an increased amount of staff time to the possible detriment of the more important functions of vocational guidance and placement. On the other hand, there are obvious advantages in all aspects of a young person's employment and unemployment being dealt with by the one staff from the one office. It remains to be seen whether this division of responsibility, abandoned in England and Wales over 40 years ago, will prove to be satisfactory.

The question of whether such a Service is really necessary can perhaps best be answered by quoting from the views expressed by the Coleraine Committee —

“ the view that there is no place for (a Youth Employment Service in conditions of under-employment) is based upon a misconception. The function of a Youth Employment Service is not to create work, but to ensure as far as possible that those who are employed are employed to the best advantage. In an area of under-employment, lack of opportunity makes the task of a Youth Employment Service more difficult, it does not make it less necessary.” (Para 12)

“ The choice of a career is too important a matter to be left to the unaided judgment and experience of the school-leaver. Where opportunities of employment are limited there is a tendency for the school-leaver to grasp at the first opening that presents itself, irrespective of any long-term consideration. This is a tendency which should not be encouraged, whether from the point of view of the individual or from that of society.” (Para 13)

“ The community has accepted the responsibility for providing a flexible system of education to cater for the individual needs of large numbers of boys and girls. Is it unreasonable to provide also a service that will complete the work of the educationalist by assessing the results and achievements of the years spent in school and, on the strength of this assessment, giving individual guidance on the choice of a career?” (Para 14)

“ At a time when the attention of the adolescent is beginning to wander, when he finds the restriction of school discipline irksome, when he is beginning to look forward to what he imagines will be independence, the Youth Employment Service is able to link education directly with the responsibilities of manhood, and thus to give it a more real significance. There is no doubt that in many cases the advice of the Youth Employment Officer has persuaded a boy or girl to complete the school course, with advantage to them and to the community.” (Para 15)

“ The majority of young people, it is true, take up unskilled employment, but some of them have special abilities which can be used if they are developed to meet the new needs of industry in the Province. It is important that these abilities should not be lost through lack of knowledge of available opportunities or of the kind of training which is necessary.” (Para. 16)

“It can be argued that the lack of large urban centres in Northern Ireland increases the difficulty in providing a comprehensive Youth Employment Service. Administrative difficulty is not a good reason for depriving young people in rural areas of facilities that will enable them to choose and obtain work most suited to their abilities.” (Para 17)

“It has also been suggested that there would be little purpose in organising a more elaborate service than exists at present because employers would normally have other sources of recruitment, they apply direct to the schools or choose children or relatives of existing employees. The school-leaver who accepts such an offer of employment is unintentionally limiting his own field of choice and the employer, who does not have a choice of candidates possessing the qualities or qualifications he needs, may not obtain the services of the most suitable person available.” (Para 18)

And, finally —

“School-leavers seeking employment may be divided into three groups. There are those of marked ability and initiative who

normally find their own jobs, but even they would find a Youth Employment Service of value in widening their field of choice. Secondly, there are those who find jobs through traditional channels such as a family's association with a particular firm. For the reasons contained in paragraph 18, the Committee thinks that this group is likely to diminish, leaving finally an increasing group which requires assistance in selecting and finding suitable employment. It is to this, the largest group, that a Youth Employment Service would be most valuable " (Para 19)

I make no excuse for quoting at such length from the Coleraine Report in view of the lucidity with which the views are expressed, and would recommend reading the text in full. I would, however, like to add one point not specifically mentioned in the Report. One result of the far-reaching changes in the field of education in recent years is the existence of a considerable number of first generation grammar school pupils. Parents exercise a very great influence on their children's choices of career but the parents of these pupils, not themselves having had the opportunity of receiving a grammar school education, are frequently extremely ignorant of the wide range of careers to which such an education can lead and are accordingly not in a position effectively to help their children with this important decision.

The first major function of the Service is that of giving vocational guidance, which may be summarised as suggesting types of employment which will provide the best opportunities for the development of a young person's capacities and interests. There are three essential prerequisites for effective vocational guidance, the first being a comprehensive knowledge of the person being advised. It is now almost universal practice to sum up the different aspects of an individual in accordance with the seven point plan of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, which provides information applicable both to the qualities of the individual and the requirements of the job. The seven points are physique, educational attainments, general ability, special aptitudes, interests, disposition and circumstances. Unfortunately, there is inadequate time to dilate upon each of these points, but the relevance of each of them would appear to be obvious. For much of this information, the Service must rely very heavily on the teachers who have had the opportunity of long term observation of the pupil. The Board will be making arrangements with Local Education Authorities and governors of voluntary schools for the rendition of confidential school-leaving reports covering the first four points, and it is also anticipated that school medical officers will provide confidential school-leaving medical reports in all cases in which any disability or medical condition is likely to affect a young person's choice of career.

It is essential that the Youth Employment Officer should obtain as complete as possible a picture of the young person he is to advise and without the full co-operation of the schools, his task will be extremely difficult if not impossible to perform

The second essential prerequisite for effective vocational guidance is comprehensive information about careers open to young people, not only in their home areas, but throughout the Province, in Great Britain and even further afield. It is not the intention of the Board to encourage migration or emigration but in those cases in which suitable opportunities are not available at home and the young person expresses a wish to move to where they do exist, the Service must be in a position to help. It is necessary to have for each individual occupation a job specification which will show the type of person most likely to succeed and be happy in that employment. A necessary preliminary is a job description based on facts collected at the actual point at which the job is done, as much as possible should be expressed in quantitative terms, generalised descriptions being of little or no value. The study of the job must be systematic and from the job description, it must be possible to deduce the standards of physique, attainment, general ability and special aptitudes required for success in it, the interests which will have scope therein, the type of disposition which will enable an individual to settle down happily in that work, and the standard of living it will allow him to maintain. Four headings are adequate for this purpose, viz a list of duties required to be performed, the training and skill required, including pre-entry standards, nature and duration of training, and usual difficulties encountered by learners, the working conditions, including the physical conditions under which the job is carried out, whether the working rhythm is fast or slow, etc., and the economic rewards attaching to the job.

For vocational guidance as opposed to vocational direction, the third essential is the dissemination of careers information so that the young people may appreciate the advice which is given and be sufficiently informed to make wise and reasoned choices of their careers. Subject to the time available in the schools for this work, there might be a planned programme of vocational information covering say the last year at school. It might commence with an introductory talk by the Youth Employment Officer which might be followed by further talks from the Officer or from representatives of employers, films, careers broadcasts and educational visits to industry. There is also great value in careers exhibitions, careers conventions and the like. The contribution of the careers teacher in this aspect of the work can be invaluable.

The culmination of the vocational guidance programme is the individual interview which, whenever practicable, should be held in the

school All initial interviews should be completed well in advance of the school-leaving date and, at the very latest, not less than four weeks before that date It is important that parents be invited to attend, not only are they interested and influential in their children's choices of careers but their knowledge of the child is extremely important and augments the information already provided by the school If they are unable to attend, it is hoped that they will see the Youth Employment Officer either before or after the interview to discuss their children's futures Whilst the facilities which can be made available will clearly vary from school to school, the guidance given is likely to be more effective if the interviews are conducted in congenial surroundings—in a cheerful room free from interruptions—and if adequate time, say an average of 15 to 20 minutes, is allowed for the dual task of fact finding and giving of advice An officer should not be required to interview more than 12 to 16 pupils per day for such work can be tiring and the last boy or girl seen during the day requires and deserves the same careful attention as that given to the first This initial interview may be only the first of a succession of interviews which may be necessary before a final choice of career is agreed

For the purposes of giving vocational guidance, the different occupations are divided into three main categories, mainly clerical, mainly social and mainly practical, in determining which of these main groups to advise, special attention is paid to the person's aptitudes and interests Each main group is subdivided into four or five levels, professional, high grade or highly skilled, skilled, semi-skilled and routine, attainments, general ability, disposition and to a lesser extent aptitudes and circumstances will have a special bearing on the level of job within the chosen group of which the young person will be capable and the level of responsibility which he will be able to sustain In the further stage of narrowing down the choice of occupation within the range already decided upon, the person's physique, aptitudes and interests will have a special relevance

Our second major function is placement, the object of which is, by co-operation with employers, to place in the most suitable employment available those young people seeking assistance Continuous liaison with employers is necessary to encourage them to notify vacancies The vocational guidance given was for a type of work but in placement, attention must also be paid to the conditions obtaining in individual firms so that misfits due, for example, to the personalities of the employer, his employees and the applicant, may be reduced to a minimum It is also important that careful pre-selection precedes submission, the co-operation of employers will be obtained and retained only if he receives from the Service the right type of applicant

The selection and submission of school-leavers should so far as possible be effected before the school leaving date. Firstly, to avoid a wastage of manpower and the possibility of deterioration due to idleness by ensuring the speedy absorption into employment of young people as they leave school. Secondly, to help to prevent the tendency of some young people, particularly in areas of under-employment, to rush into unsuitable employment as soon as they are "off the leash". And thirdly, to avoid queues of job-seekers at Youth Employment Offices at the end of each term, the existence of such queues not only depresses those who wait in them, but also prevents the Youth Employment Officer giving to each case the full and individual treatment required.

There will be continuous liaison between officers working in the different areas of the Province so that transfers may be effected when suitable opportunities are not available in the applicant's home area or when employers are unable to obtain enough suitable recruits locally. In some cases, financial assistance may be available from the Ministry of Labour to make such transfers possible. Whilst the Service cannot create employment, it will search out vacancies wherever they may be found. Many an employer has been persuaded to review his labour requirements and to take on additional young people particularly suited to his type of work and it is believed that a considerable amount can be achieved in this way.

Our third major function is Review of Progress, the object of which is to review the industrial progress of young people, to furnish them with advice and information regarding educational and recreational facilities, and to assist them in any way possible during the difficult transitional period which frequently occurs between leaving school and becoming settled in the right employment. Some three to six months after commencing work, young people will be invited to call in to discuss their work and any problems they may have or, if unable to attend in person, to write in and let us know how they are getting on. The Youth Employment Officer will exercise his discretion in each case as to whether and when further reviews should be made.

The Service will be provided by Youth Employment Officers based on the more populous towns in the Province, with the exception that the older school-leavers will be catered for by officers specialising in those careers requiring pre-entry academic qualifications who will operate from a central Careers Office in Belfast. An Area Youth Employment Committee, comprising representatives of the Local Education Authorities concerned, teachers, both sides of industry and others interested in and knowledgeable about the welfare of young people, will be appointed for each of the Areas into which the Province will be divided for Youth Employment Services purposes. The role of

these Committees will be to advise the Board as to the discharge of its functions in their respective Areas

Whilst the facilities previously provided for Belfast schools by the Belfast Youth Advisory Service are being maintained, the Board is not yet in a position to provide a comprehensive service, premises are still required in some areas and more officers have to be recruited and trained. A number of officers are at present in the field throughout the Province conducting a survey of employment prospects and it is hoped to be able to start to provide an advisory service in at least some schools during the summer term.

In addition to, or rather in the course of carrying out, its three major functions, the Service can contribute greatly to a better understanding between education and industry. As a link between the two, it must interpret the one to the other. It can, and will whenever so requested, help in the formulation or revision of methods of recruitment and schemes of training. Whilst there will always be a number of jobs which offer little or no progression, one aim of the Service is to help to reduce these to a minimum and to ensure that as many young people as possible enter progressive employment.

It is the considered view of Youth Employment Officers as a body that all young people should be deemed to be under training at least until the age of 18 years. Whilst a great deal of attention is paid, quite rightly, to the ways in which apprentices should be trained, it should be remembered that skilled tradesmen comprise less than 40% of the working population, and whilst applauding the excellent training provided by many of the larger employers, one should not forget that the majority of our workpeople are employed by small firms in many of which training facilities are either inadequate or non-existent.

“Standing next to George” is an outmoded and wasteful method of training, yet it is still practised by large numbers of employers. Different people take different times to acquire the same skills, yet most apprenticeships are still geared to a fixed term of years and apprentices become craftsmen by attending a place of employment for the stipulated period without being required to achieve any stated standard of proficiency. While many do so, very few are required even to attend, let alone pass, any course of technical education or trade training.

The standards that can be achieved by full-time training have been proved by the training establishments of H. M. Forces and more recently by the schemes of first year apprenticeship training in Government Training Centres. It is more than time that such schemes were greatly extended and became acknowledged as a method of training more appropriate to this day and age. The proposals of the Westminster Government published in the recent White Paper on Industrial Training

are welcome, but long overdue. It will be interesting to see how soon and in what form they are embodied in legislation and how long thereafter and to what extent they become operative.

In Northern Ireland, rather more has been done to increase training facilities. The additional apprenticeship scheme and the new scheme to provide first year apprenticeship training without the trainees having first been engaged by employers are steps in the right direction. They are indications of the will of the Government, employers and the trades unions to increase the economic prosperity of the Province by attracting more industries which can offer progressive employment.

And progressive employment is the main objective of young people leaving school. It is also their right—it should not be their privilege. It is towards helping them to achieve this objective that the efforts of the Board and of its officers will be directed.

DISCUSSION

Mr D M Paulin in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr Jenks, welcomed the setting up of the Northern Ireland Youth Employment Service Board. There were advantages in having an independent board instead of leaving it to the discretion of local authorities whether or not they would provide a service—as was the case in Great Britain.

Much rethinking needed to be done on the training of young people.

Mr W J Blease seconded the vote of thanks and pointed out that many parents nowadays found it difficult to advise their children on their future careers. The Trade Unions would have to look into the question of training as it posed many problems for them.

Prof J R Parkinson said the Board seemed too heavily weighted with representatives of local education authorities. If it was to secure the co-operation of industry it would be better to have more representatives from both sides of industry.