

# Understanding Advancement

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ICEGS OCCASIONAL PAPER

The International Centre for Guidance Studies is delighted to publish this Occasional Paper in partnership with CFE. This paper explores how the vision of advancement has advanced since first mooted in this context in John Denham's Fabian Society speech in 2004. It looks at the reform agenda from three perspectives; the individual, the workplace, and the advancement agencies which support them.

It goes on to look at ways of achieving advancement and government's role in the process. It concludes that advancement is a long term investment involving considerable culture change for individuals, employers and the agencies that serve them.

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### Abstract

The concept of 'advancement' has been central to the debate in relation to the most effective ways of achieving the twin policy goals of high employment alongside high productivity. It is based on how the system looks from the perspective of the individual who often faces multiple barriers in accessing both learning and work. In this way it is linked to the wider agenda of the personalisation of public services. What is different from other approaches is that advancement is also about how support for (and challenge to) the individual is delivered holistically. This involves bringing together what are currently discrete and disparate advice services for: housing, employment, learning, health and benefits/personal finances.

The reform necessary to achieve the advancement vision is one where the reform of public services is undertaken alongside the 'reform' of the individual and the workplace. Barriers to individual access to and progression within employment are often systemic within workplace practices and do not align with those of the agencies supporting individuals. Advancement is also about addressing this lack of alignment through support (and challenge) to employers, individuals and the services that support them. It is therefore a process of culture change as well as systems change.

This paper explores how the vision of advancement has advanced since first mooted in this context in John Denham's Fabian Society speech in 2004. It looks at the reform agenda from three perspectives:

- The individual;
- The workplace; and
- The advancement agencies which support them.

It concludes by looking at ways of achieving advancement and government's role in the process through strategic commitments to – segmentation; stimulation; regulation; and capacity building.

### Where did the term come from and why is it important?

#### Introduction

This paper has been prepared jointly by the Centre for Enterprise (CFE), and the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), University of Derby. It presents the policy context wherein the term advancement has been developed and unpacks the meaning of the term, its alignment with the personalisation agenda and its place in the development of ideas underpinning the new adult advancement and careers service (aacs). With the benefit of over four years' hindsight the paper traces the extent to which the central ideas associated with advancement have developed and does so from three key perspectives: individuals, employers and the agencies themselves. The paper concludes by offering some reflections on how the concept can be taken forward within the framework of new services.

#### Understanding the policy context

The term advancement first appeared in skills policy documents at the time John Denham became Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills in June 2007. Previously government had made a commitment to develop a 'universal adult careers service' resulting from the outcomes of the Leitch review<sup>1</sup>. In November 2007<sup>2</sup> this became 'an adult advancement and careers service' (then in lower case). Many observers at the time spotted a reference to Denham's 2004 speech to the Fabian Society, 'Making Work Work'.

In 2004, Denham – then out of government but chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee – was not referring specifically to careers advice but more generally to how people 'get on' in society. In doing so he sought to reclaim traditional Labour Party territory of individuals getting on through collective action, partly, though not exclusively enabled by the

<sup>1</sup> Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) (2007). World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review for skills in England, Cm 7181. London: DIUS.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and DIUS (2007). Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making Skills Work. Cm 7288. London: TSO.

state. Thus for Denham a Labour government, would need to make sure that its programme of skills reforms was not just seen as part of a 'technocratic ...or business agenda' but as 'a drive for opportunity, ambition and achievement'<sup>3</sup>.

Denham argued that in order to bring about the culture change required to make this happen, the first step was to see the way the system works through the eyes of the individual:

*If this lecture can claim any insight it is that we need to see the system as it appears to the people we are trying to help.<sup>4</sup>*

Thus, the advancement debate is closely aligned with that around the personalisation (and co-design) of public services. The issue of personalisation was also being given increasing prominence at the time of Denham's 2004 lecture and subsequently has been proposed as a model for public sector management: a new paradigm and philosophy to shape policy developments at all levels. The ideas underpinning personalisation were initially proposed in a Demos pamphlet by Charles Leadbeater<sup>5</sup>, with several subsequent publications and speeches<sup>6</sup> to develop and test the concept further. There are five key themes associated with the personalisation of services:

- Providing people with a more customer-friendly interface with existing services;
- Giving users more say in navigating their way through services once they have got access to them;
- Giving users more direct say over how money is spent;
- Enabling users to participate actively in the design and provision of services; and
- Encouraging public goods to emerge, in part, through public policy helping to shape millions

of individual self-organising decisions.

The personalisation debate also influenced thinking about the future development of careers services. At least one eminent author felt that these could develop along a continuum<sup>7</sup>, ranging from enhanced telephone access and web-based provision through to self-directed services that harnessed the buying power of individuals to demand services from networks of providers, through to Individual Learning Account type systems. Such thinking around enhanced access and customer focussed services can be seen in the emerging design of the aacs today, with its emphasis on 'no wrong door', and flexible delivery.

The personalisation agenda also focuses on government creating the environment for individuals to take decisions about their own lives; Leadbeater<sup>8</sup> refers to this as 'bottom up, mass social innovation enabled by the state'. Elements of this have been incorporated into both the Denham vision and Leitch's recommendations for a 'universal adult careers service'.

But where the advancement debate differs from that around personalisation is the argument that the former can only be secured through the transformation of individual ambition *alongside* the reform of agencies, and, more radically, the reform of employment practice. Support for individuals is a core element of advancement, but not its sole focus. Advancement is therefore, closely bound up with cultural shifts required around the respective roles of state, employer and individual. In doing so it raises big questions about the role of government and its intervention in the employment and work market-place. This will be returned to later in the discussion.

### Understanding the labour market

At the heart of Denham's argument was the recognition that although there were plenty of jobs

in the booming 2004 economy this was not the same as saying there were plenty of *opportunities* because the market is notoriously 'imperfect'. The UK's relative economic success was determined by high-volume, low-value-added work. This required lower skills levels than the model of a high-productivity, high-skills, high-value-added economy that it was thought the UK needed for it to compete in a globalised market.

However as skills gaps and shortages characterised sectors of the UK labour market, the problem was how to shift the UK from one model to another. It was not desirable for the Labour Party to achieve high productivity at the expense of high employment for example by importing high skilled labour. This option could exacerbate the long-term problem of deskilling future generations and accepting a society where social divides and inter-generational poverty was inevitable.

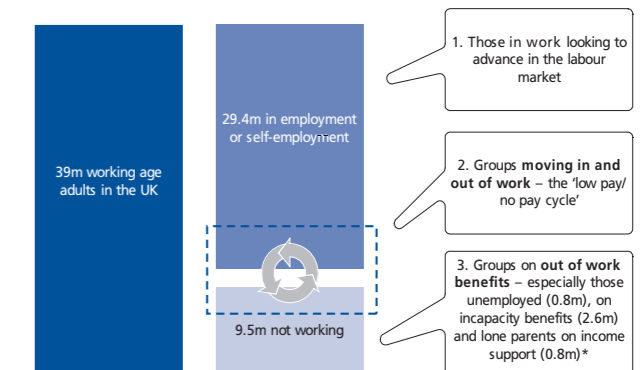
The response that combined social sustainable economic well-being and social justice was to address labour market imperfections through a programme of inter-generational skills development and enhancement. Once the government had committed to the twin track approach of high productivity and high employment, it was committed to one of advancement. One way of illustrating this is provided in figure 1 reproduced from the government's *Life Chances* project<sup>9</sup>.

This illustrates the challenges faced in moving from a 75% to an 80% employment rate. If we take the top of the diagram as high skilled jobs and the bottom as lower skilled work for unemployed people to move through the system, they either have to take low skilled jobs vacated by people advancing through the system, or higher skills jobs they are qualified to do but are excluded from due to, most typically, a combination of barriers to access.

Understanding these barriers is crucial to helping people access the labour market and remain in 'sustainable jobs'. For a number of groups (care-leavers, ex-offenders, and people with disabilities or

health problems) the journey to employment to reach the average 80% employment rate is a very long one.

Figure 1: Life Chances: labour market analysis



Initiatives like the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) led Employment, Retention and Advancement Demonstration (ERAD) project, which started in June 2001, developed after a 'review of research evidence and administrative data' from other initiatives that indicated the problem of the so-called 'low-pay/no-pay' cycle. For example, about a third of lone parents on the New Deal who got a job were back on Income Support within a year<sup>10</sup>. Research in this field tended to indicate, at the time, that it was important to have a more sophisticated analysis of the needs of different groups of economically inactive people, the barriers they face and therefore the policies designed to address them.

Denham recognised that for many people in the tax credit economy their experience of the labour market was characterised by: low income, low aspirations, little access to training, little access to personal development, no long-term security, little job flexibility, less ability to balance with caring responsibilities, working with smaller employers, or being self-employed.

This led to a realisation that the market for advancement services for the economically inactive could be segmented in a number of ways. Only some of these would be in terms of welfare benefits

3 Denham, J. (2004). Making Work Work: Creating Chances Across the Labour Market, Lecture to the Fabian Society, 17 May 2004. London: Fabian Society. Available from: <http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/MakingWorkWork.pdf> [Accessed 12 March 2009].

4 *ibid.*

5 Leadbeater, C. (2004). Personalisation Through Participation. London: Demos.

6 See [www.demos.co.uk/themes/~personalisation](http://www.demos.co.uk/themes/~personalisation).

7 Watts, A.G. (2004). Personalisation: An Opportunity and Challenge for Career Guidance Services. London: Careers England.

8 Leadbeater, C. (2004). Personalisation Through Participation. London: Demos. p.16.

9 DWP, DIUS and Cabinet Office (2008). Life Chances: Supporting People to Get on in the Labour Market. London: Cabinet Office, p.49.

10 Evans, M., Eyre, J., Millar, J., and Sarre, S. (2003). New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis of the National Evaluation, DWP Research Report 163, London: DWP.

(where there are some government levers on individual behaviours). Others were seen as more complex where it was the inflexible nature of the workplace itself that presented the barrier.

In short, advancement is a concept that is relevant to all individuals whatever their place in the labour market, and it recognises both the supply and the demand side of how the market operates. These points are crucial to thinking at the time and Denham's argument in 'Making Work Work': the workplace is as big an issue in advancement as the skills and behaviours of individuals or indeed the agencies they engage with. In short, to achieve advancement you have to support the *capabilities and capacity of employers* as well as those they employ.

So the term advancement was being used to talk about both a cluster of ideas around retention in work, progression, promotion and upskilling within the workplace (i.e. associated with high productivity), *and* advancing into the workplace for those currently not participating in the workforce (i.e. linked to high employment).

This is important because it is impossible to deliver on the twin policy track of high productivity and high employment without the concept of advancement. It is difficult because achieving advancement depends on culture change for individuals, agencies of government and, crucially, employers. To influence two out of the three components is not enough, as they are mutually dependent.

**What was the vision for achieving advancement in 2004?**

*What people need is a new service able to support and guide them through the complex choices they have to make. Its selling point might be that it's the number to call if you want – in an old-fashioned phrase – to better yourself. A service based on a network of what I call advancement agencies.<sup>11</sup>*

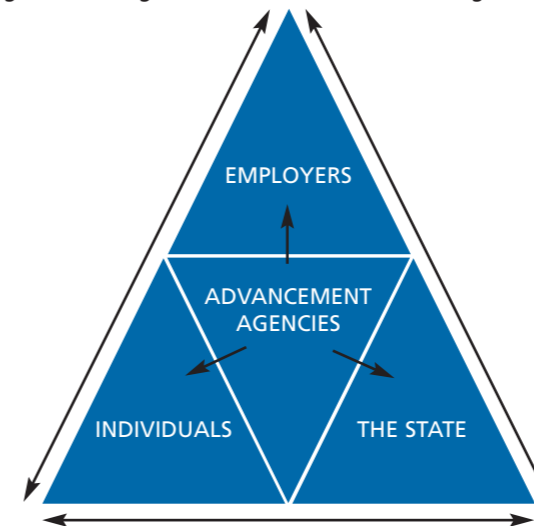
11 Denham, J. (2004). Making Work Work: Creating Chances Across the Labour Market, Lecture to the Fabian Society, 17 May 2004. London: Fabian Society. Available from: <http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/MakingWorkWork.pdf> [Accessed 12 March 2009].

In 2004 John Denham referred to a network of what he termed 'advancement agencies' whose primary purpose would be to support and guide individuals through complex choices and to 'better' themselves. Many practitioners who worked in local authority Careers Services will recall having a drawer of records officially labelled 'Betterment' – case files of young people who were not content with their current job/training scheme and wanted 'something better'.

This proposed network of advancement agencies would have a role in supporting individuals, and particularly those in work, to consider what their 'best next step' would be, and in effect 'to supply the professional HR [human resource] support that small companies cannot sustain themselves'. Not only that, they would need to be designed to respond to those who already felt they needed support, and to create the impetus for those who might perhaps be lacking in self confidence or awareness of opportunities and may therefore not yet have articulated their personal needs. The Agencies would, in effect be market makers for personalised advancement services.

In focusing on the needs of the individual, advancement agencies might be challenged by prevailing practice within the workplace that could be suppressing individuals' advancement. Thus they might be called upon to broker solutions that benefit both employer and employee, perhaps by supporting the commissioning of training that suits the needs of both. In cases where people were being held back because of an employer's (perhaps unconscious) disregard for employment rights, Denham argued that the advancement agencies should have real teeth to encourage first, and enforce last, change in employment practices. So what was described in 2004 was a network of agencies that would offer services focussed around the individual, and in so doing bring together the range of advice and support agencies working with individuals and employers to encourage more efficient working, with a more effective personalised service. In addition those networks would then also become a conduit of information and insight into

**Figure 2: Placing the network of advancement agencies**



working lives which could be tapped by government to learn about the real experience of workers across the country.

As such, Denham envisaged a role for a network of agencies sitting between individual, employers and the state. This can be presented as a triangular relationship model (see Figure 2), where advancement agencies would provide a service to all three customers at the same time<sup>12</sup>.

In a given locality, therefore, advancement agencies could supply HR advice to employers, careers advice to individuals and feedback to government. In this it is not dissimilar with job-matching schemes but with the added recognition that sometimes the workplace needs to be supported through change as well as the individual.

In terms of achieving this there was to be 'no prescriptive model' but rather a set of principles:

- Provision of a single point of contact for the user, thus requiring staff who can deal with a range of issues;
- Build on existing brand names and skills of those already providing valuable services;
- Draw in the skills and networks of voluntary

12 It is also important to note that each customer has a relationship with each other.

13 Denham, J. (2004). Making Work Work: Creating Chances Across the Labour Market, Lecture to the Fabian Society, 17 May 2004. London: Fabian Society. Available from: <http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/MakingWorkWork.pdf> [Accessed 12 March 2009].

14 HM Treasury (2006). Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the Global Economy –World Class Skills. London: TSO. And DIUS (2007). World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review for Skills in England. Cm 7181. London: DIUS.

sector organisations and the trades union movement;

- Ensure relevance to all employers regardless of size or sector; and
- Cost efficient, through rationalisation of the proliferation of advisory bodies.

At the time, Denham noted that "establishing agencies which enjoy the trust of employees and employers, as well as training providers, advice agencies and others is not going to be a simple task".<sup>13</sup>

**How has advancement advanced since 2004?**

If we accept the proposition that advancement is a tripartite policy aspiration to promote culture change in individuals, employers and the agencies that serve them, it is interesting to look at progress in each of these three areas.

**Changing advice agencies?**

Lord Leitch (2006, 2007)<sup>14</sup>, in his review and the subsequent government implementation plan, set the agenda for the development of a new service which would integrate the primary providers of information, advice and guidance for adults (nextstep and learndirect) to support and promote the skills agenda. The Leitch implementation plan reiterated a commitment to a universal adult careers service. It stated:

*The new adult careers service will be charged with raising aspiration and awareness of the importance and benefits of learning, particularly among those that have missed out in the past. It will lead a sustained national campaign to promote skills development among groups that would not normally consider learning. (Leitch 2006. 6.24).*

Although this has since developed into the proposed aacs, the change is in more than a name. The Leitch vision does not correlate precisely with that of advancement. This is because the latter concept recognises that it is not just skills that are holding people back; it is often lack of skills combined with other barriers to getting into work and getting on. Some of these barriers are very practical whilst others are rooted in individual behaviours and attitudes. The advancement concept recognises that in the way Leitch did not.

So since 2007, at least, we have the idea of a single, universal service whose focus and purpose is to encourage all individuals to manage and advance their skills, qualifications and careers. In doing this, the service<sup>15</sup> will respond to the needs of individuals and employers - and help people find sustainable work that in turn makes the economy more competitive and successful on the global stage. It will be able to offer:

- A 'no wrong door' approach - the new service is open to everyone;
- A more targeted approach to those groups who do need more help: those who are stuck in low-paid jobs or who are 'remote' from the labour market;
- Flexible delivery methods that suit the customer (online, phone, face-to-face);
- Being part of a streamlined Skills Funding Agency that also routes public money swiftly and securely to FE colleges and providers;
- Better public information about the new service;
- Better guiding of customers to the right training (college, workplace, apprenticeship);
- Advice on barriers to learning (caring responsibilities, financial worries, housing issues); and

- Faster response to skills pressures and bottlenecks that are often manifested in sectoral, regional and sub-regional patterns - i.e. rarely following local authority boundaries.

But in addition to all this, and central to its mission, the aacs will deliver a joined-up advice service covering housing, disability, employment rights, health, childcare, skills and careers advice, financial and personal issues. Key features will be the use of new technologies, including the internet-based skills health checks, and targeted provision but within a strong universal all-age careers strategy. It will be delivered by a network of agencies that will include specialist careers advice and guidance providers together with specialist providers supporting childcare and employment rights etc: all will be within the 'no wrong door' concept.

The aacs, therefore, aims to be an integrated service with a purpose and professional ethic to support all individuals to achieve their potential. Many of these ideas emerged out of the 2006-7 Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Review process<sup>16</sup>. What advancement adds is the all-encompassing vision that comes with it and the idea that it is the *workplace* that needs to be reformed as well as the *workforce*.

Of course the IAG Review also threw up a number of challenges associated with the delivery of a universal adult careers service. As with Leitch's plea not to 'chop and change' the current system too much, it was felt important to build on the experience that the Careers Advice Service (then called *learndirect* advice) had gained over the last ten years in focusing and delivering a service which has attracted clients from all walks of life.<sup>17</sup> The service has ambitious aims and objectives which focus on changing generations of culture in some settings. The Institute of Career Guidance<sup>18</sup> in its response to Leitch (2007) refers to the poverty of aspiration as a major contributor to the numbers from deprived communities who lack employment

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.iagreview.org.uk/vision/>

<sup>16</sup> Hutchinson, J. and Jackson, H. (2008). Cross Government Review of Information Advice and Guidance Services for Adults in England, Summary Report. London: DIUS. Available from: <http://www.iagreview.org.uk/keydocs/> [Accessed 12 March 2009].

<sup>17</sup> Watts, A.G. and Dent, G. (2008). The evolution of a national distance guidance service: trends and challenges. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 36(4), 455-465.

<sup>18</sup> Institute of Career Guidances (ICG) (2007). *World Class Skills: The future Role of Career Information, Advice and Guidance in Promoting the New Culture of Learning*. Stourbridge: ICG. Available from: <http://www.icg-uk.org/download1059.html> [Accessed 12 March 2009].

and skills. So in designing a universal service accessibility and usability has to be ensured for those who face the most significant barriers alongside those who are already advancing well within the labour market, this presents a significant tension and one which Connexions Services were unable to fully address though conceived as a universal service, tended to focus on socially excluded young people<sup>19</sup>. Undoubtedly there has been significant progress in the reform of advice agencies in the last eighteen months. Whether this has focussed predominantly on services to individuals at the expense of challenge to employers remains to be seen.

### Changing individuals?

The aacs is identified as having a key role in supporting the changes outlined in a number of joint DIUS/DWP policy papers: specifically, in providing easily accessible information and advice to enhance job sustainability and career progression, and to overcome barriers such as finance and childcare responsibilities. All members of society will be able to access help on learning, work and careers; in addition, a range of services including skills screening and the full 'skills health check' will be made available to benefits recipients who will be referred to the aacs at regular points.

Here lies the greatest challenge: how to promote a universal service that is also a primary referral agency for Jobcentre Plus (JCP). JCP clients with basic and low skills will be mandated to undertake a skills health check with the aacs<sup>20</sup>. This mandate could generate a stigma associated with the new service which could potentially alienate others who would benefit. Ironically, launching a new service of this nature during the current economic downturn could present opportunities for a genuine universal service with so many people of all educational backgrounds currently seeking to return to the job market. Significant investment has been made in universal advertising campaigns aimed at 'raising aspirations' and encouraging personal responsibility.

<sup>19</sup> Watts, A.G. (2001). Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 29(2), 157-176.

<sup>20</sup> DWP and DIUS (2007). *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making Skills Work*. Cm 7288. London: TSO.

<sup>21</sup> Finegold, D. (1988). The failure of training in Britain: analysis and prescription. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Autumn, 21-51.

<sup>22</sup> DWP and DIUS (2007). *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making Skills Work*. Cm 7288. London: TSO.

<sup>23</sup> CBI (2008). *Taking Stock: CBI Education and Skills Survey*. London: CBI.

It is unclear at this stage how these address barriers beyond the attitudinal. Financial barriers will be addressed in part at least through Skills Accounts, and direct payments like the Adult Learning Grant. There has also been some reform to welfare rules aimed to address individual disincentives to train. However, arguably the greatest emphasis has been placed on 'stick' rather than 'carrot' at this stage.

### Changing the workplace?

For the advancement agenda to be successful for all, services for individuals must be placed in context (see Figure 2). It is essential to consider the role of government in influencing the employment and work market-place. Individuals can be empowered to address their poor skills, limited qualifications and literacy and numeracy issues, but the creation of opportunities for true advancement requires a working environment that is accommodating and flexible. Reform of the workplace is a vital component in creating equality of opportunity and a vision which ensures that advancement is a reality.

The concept of a service whose ultimate aim is to support individuals in developing skills, qualifications (and indirectly, confidence) is one which may be at odds with those employers whose primary aim is to maintain the 'low skills equilibrium'<sup>21</sup>. The government's ambition to move to an 80% employment rate with a highly skilled and competitive workforce<sup>22</sup> poses an increasingly significant challenge. A range of initiatives have been recently introduced to support this, including: the skills pledge, Train to Gain, flexible working, and, potentially, Time to Train.

The CBI / Edexcel Education and Skills Survey (2008)<sup>23</sup> presents a worrying picture, with 53% of employers concerned about recruiting sufficiently skilled individuals, combined with only just over a third satisfied with the skills levels of the low-level employees. Making these initiatives work is imperative to the success of the skills strategy and its goal of creating a highly skilled and productive

workforce. Its achievement requires a culture change both in how employees and employers perceive the benefits individually and collectively of developing skills and attaining higher-level qualifications. Currently much of the marketing in relation to this is delivered separately, as with the LSC Campaign 'It's in your hands' focusing on individual motivation.

*The skills pledge*

The skills pledge was introduced in 2007 to create a partnership approach to address skills gaps identified by employers. Primarily linked to Train to Gain, employers aim to raise the productivity of the workforce through a public commitment to skills development and training. This aspect of the skills pledge is designed to maintain the commitment of companies to invest in developing their staff sufficiently to meet the evolving needs of the business. The pledge is centred on empowering employers to shape their skills requirements and focus on a demand-led approach to skills putting the employer first. Train to Gain brokerage services then personalise a package of support for employers who have made the skills pledge to ensure that their individual needs are being met. This investment and promotion of the benefits of skills development remains developmental, with just over 3,700 employers having signed up<sup>24</sup> as of 2008.

Allied to the skills pledge, the 'jobs pledge' is aimed at encouraging public and private sector employers to offer jobs to the most disadvantaged within the labour market<sup>25</sup>, building on local employment initiatives.

*Flexible working*

The barriers for those who have been out of the workplace for a significant amount of time can often appear insurmountable. Working hours in particular can offer one of the most challenging barriers with employers. The legal right to request flexible working has been in place since 1996 and

applies to those with parental responsibility for children under 6 years of age. The government has been exploring this further to offer opportunities for all parents with children under 16 years. Flexible working is defined as any working pattern other than the normal working practices within the organisation. There is clear legislation to support these practices, and the recent Walsh Review (2008)<sup>26</sup> provides evidence that 91% of requests to work flexibly are granted. A key issue which has yet to be addressed is the impact of the ageing population. There is no legislation, for example, to support those who need to work flexibly to support an ageing dependant, and yet elder carers were a key group mentioned in the aacs prospectus launch<sup>27</sup>.

*Time to Train*

As part of the whole package of enhancing individuals' opportunities, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) has recently conducted a consultation on a new right to request time off to train. This puts the emphasis on the individual having a right to ask, but maintains the employer's right to refuse. It is hoped that this will encourage more work based discussions about skills and qualifications. All of the legislation focusing on the 'right to ask' assumes that individuals have the confidence to engage an employer in this type of dialogue and to follow it up if they are not successful. The evidence for this policy was based in part on the implementation of flexible working- despite these being two quite different initiatives<sup>28</sup>. Some commentators have predicted that many employees are likely to require intermediaries to take on an advocacy role to support them, as is currently the case with Union Learning Representatives within unionised workplaces. Unfortunately these are not the kind of employers that Denham targets in 'Making Work Work'. Therefore there would be a role for advancement agencies in making Time to Train work. As with all universally available services differential levels of mediation will be required for

24 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (2008). Train to Gain and Skills Pledge 2007/08 Period 10 MI Report. Coventry: LSC.

25 DWP (2007). In Work Better Off: Next Steps to Full Employment. Cm 7130. London: TSO.

26 Walsh, I. (2008). Flexible Working: A Review of how to Extend the Right to Request Flexible Working to Parents of Older Children. London: Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).

27 See John Denham's speech 29 October 2008 at [www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/denham](http://www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/denham).

28 Ravenhall, M. (2008). 'Time to Train,' Workplace Learning and Skills Bulletin, Issue 3.

certain target groups. It is relatively easy to see how you might allocate entitlements to mediation for individuals but it is unclear at this stage how you could do it for types of business.

The aacs is therefore rapidly taking shape and is developing infrastructure, priorities and methods of working to support individuals through skills development to participation in the workforce. Despite the skills pledge and Time to Train, which are both essentially voluntarist interventions, the advancement reform agenda has not yet focussed on the workplace. This is perhaps not surprising given that government has stronger levers on individuals (particularly those receiving welfare benefits) than on employers. Let us now look at more developed role for government in making advancement work.

**What would make advancement work?**

**Role of government**

Advancement offers an agenda that could stimulate a range of organisations that together offer exciting potential for integration of services with a purpose and professional ethic to support all individuals – as employers, employees, volunteers and those seeking to enter the workforce – to achieve advancement in their lives. As this paper has already noted, the delivery of the advancement agenda is both important and difficult.

Within this context, it is clear that there has been some element of market failure, noted by the IAG Review<sup>29</sup>. In terms of addressing these, government approaches to market intervention tend to fall into four types. Each is used in varying degrees to address 'market failure', where the absence of government intervention will lead to the non-achievement of policy goals<sup>30</sup>:

- Segmentation (understanding different customers' demands);

- Stimulation (encouraging demand in various/all segments);
- Regulation (making sure the market delivers quality and equality outcomes); and
- Capacity building (making sure there are sufficient resources to deliver).

It is interesting to look at government's role in making advancement work in terms of each of these four types of intervention.

**Segmentation**

A service that is universally available will not be experienced by users with universal conformity. Individuals' needs vary depending upon their skills and backgrounds, life stage and aspiration. Similarly employers have different needs as determined by the sector and locality in which they operate, and their size, values and future aspirations.

The aacs will offer a range of services universally, but within an overall policy of 'progressive universalism', where certain clients are targeted and prioritised. That being said, the potential recipients of the services available will be as diverse as the 50 year old who has been on Incapacity Benefit<sup>31</sup> for eight years, the professional woman returning to work after her child has started school, the 20 year old who has just come out of prison, the 47 year old accountant who is being made redundant, and the lone parent who has never worked. All of these individuals will require a personalised service and one where the concept of advancement is also personalised.

In order to do so, government will need to take a strategic approach to segmenting the market in a more comprehensive manner than has hitherto been the case, if it is to be genuinely and 'progressively' universal. The development of types of service user, their characteristics and the ranges of presenting issues they bring to services could provide a sophisticated base upon which to model and then commission services.

29 Hutchinson, J. and Jackson, H. (2008). Cross Government Review of Information Advice and Guidance Services for Adults in England, Summary Report. London: DIUS. Available from: <http://www.iagreview.org.uk/keydocs/> [Accessed 12 March 2009].

30 Watts, G., Hughes, D. & Wood, M. (2005). A Market in Career? Evidence and Issues. CeGS Occasional Paper. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

31 LSC (2008). A Guide to the North East Labour Market For Those Who Work in Adult Information, and Advice and Guidance. Gateshead: LSC.

To date, market segmentation of individuals has been on the basis of qualifications, benefit eligibility, transitional stage, age, and proximity to disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Segmentation of employers and employer needs has been undertaken geographically and sectorally, with some additional meta-analysis of skill needs. A comprehensive approach to segmentation requires a strategic response to the market as a whole. In developing that response, the lessons from the Careers Advice Service should not be lost. The power of marketing a strong brand, a professional staff, investment in initial training and continuing professional development, and an ethos of personalisation of services have combined to deliver accessible services to customers from all walks of life. However, a network of advancement agencies should not seek to replicate one model but rather blend an offer that responds to the needs of all segments of the market to offer a menu of personalised services.

**Stimulation**

Stimulation encourages employers and individuals to engage in a process of reflection, motivation and commitment to advancement within their own particular contexts. It is an ambitious requirement, as in some settings it means changing generations of culture. But it is also vital.

Stimulation of a market to deliver the advancement agenda could be achieved through the application of three principles. Firstly devolution of decision making to a regional, sub-regional, local or community level to ensure that services are developed in a way that both stimulates demand and responds to it. So, for example, the marketing campaigns run by the new local Business Link Partnerships in the 1980s promoted interest in the concept of local business support, which was then delivered by a business adviser, building a package of tailored business support through referral and direct delivery.

The second principle of stimulation is partnership engagement which would need to be at a strategic level to ensure that advancement is a priority policy

cascaded from national to regional and local partners. The key partners must include employers (on the demand side), individuals (on the supply side), and brokers such as the providers of skills training and qualifications, sector or business representatives. Regional Skills Partnerships, Employment and Skills Boards and Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) all offer real potential in this area, although the former tends to have patchy awareness of advice and guidance issues<sup>32</sup>. Advancement agencies should be actively engaged in these structures.

Partnership engagement could also become a powerful driver of the agenda at an operational level. Bringing employer focussed support agencies such as Business Link, and memberships groups (e.g. CBI and Chambers of Commerce) alongside other aacs services could generate packages of support that promote progression and advancement for individuals within the workplace.

The third principle is branding and the terminology used to describe the service. Career guidance services have in the past suffered from lack of shared identity, for example, Wilson and Jackson's<sup>33</sup> study of adults' expectations and requirements of guidance found that the terms 'guidance' and 'career guidance' meant little to many of those consulted. The term advancement is equally likely to confuse potential users and could encourage the service to be conceived differently by policy makers, practitioners and the public. If advancement continues to be promoted through the aacs, then it needs to be associated with a clear brand and a national communications campaign to ensure that it is meaningful for customers and for service providers alike.

**Regulation**

The application of public money to stimulate a market for the work of advancement agencies must be accompanied by appropriate regulatory mechanisms, to ensure that all services within the network of agencies are high quality, and are delivering meaningful outcomes.

32 See IAG Review, op cit. LLNs have dedicated IAG resource.

33 Wilson, J. and Jackson, H. (1999). What are Adults' Expectations and Requirements of Guidance? A Millennium Agenda? Winchester: The Guidance Council.

Quality standards for the delivery of guidance services currently exist in the form of the matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance services and the Ofsted inspection regime. These will be reviewed in 2009 to create common service standards for organisations providing advice on careers and skills<sup>34</sup>. The issue for this review is to identify what specifically denotes a quality service that promotes motivation and support for individuals and for employers to engage in 'betterment'; and how this might be different from a quality guidance service and business advice and support service. The question then is whether existing definitions of quality and their accompanying kitemarks are sufficiently robust to service the advancement service well, whether they should be further adapted and modified, or whether a whole new set of quality standards should be devised.

The essence of advancement will be the extent to which advancement agencies and the services which they individually and collectively provide are able to interface between the personalised agenda of support for individuals and the drive for productivity benefits among employers. These two goals may be mutually reinforcing but it is not inevitable that they should be. The service will need to be accountable for its actions, but caution should be taken to ensure that targets are not set that promote the needs of one agenda over any other. In other words, the service should be accountable, but not driven by performance management 'hard outcomes'. The recognition and measurement of 'soft' outcomes will provide an incremental and holistic approach to evidencing and recognising individual advancement.

**Capacity Building**

In stimulating a market for advancement services, government has a responsibility to ensure there is capacity to deliver. This means that there needs to be people who can deliver quality services, in accessible places, using a range of modes of delivery.

34 DIUS. (2008). Shaping the Future – a New Adult Advancement and Career Service for England. London: HMSO.

35 Skill Commission. (2008). Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising Our Potential in the 21st Century. London: Skills Commission.

36 DIUS. (2008). Shaping the Future – a New Adult Advancement and Career Service for England. London: HMSO.

An effective service is likely to be one delivered by professionals who are knowledgeable, culturally sensitive, friendly and approachable, well trained and credible. Advice and guidance professionals already have such attributes but there are (possibly) too few fully trained professionals, with a plethora of different qualifications on offer, voluntary continuing professional development requirements and an informal approach to training those who deliver guidance services as a minor part of their job role. Making advancement work therefore requires a review of qualifications, and of professional development for those within a professional association and those outside such a body. This has already been fully articulated within the Skills Commission inquiry into Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)<sup>35</sup>. It is already underway as part of the workforce development strategy being developed by UK Commission for Employment and Skills<sup>36</sup>. However, for advancement to work, its specific nature and in particular its juxtaposition between the needs of individuals and of employers should be considered as part of the review process.

Capacity is also about accessibility and ensuring that services are personalised to client needs and preferences. This includes having services that are delivered using new technologies, alongside those offered as part of a face-to-face relationship, at times and locations that make them accessible universally. The physical location of the advancement service in a community will say a lot to clients about its role and purpose. For example, an office based in a shopping centre will attract different clients to one based in a Jobcentre Plus office, a college or a public library. The physical location of the aacs will shape not just its delivery but also its public perception and ultimately its success or failure.

**Concluding thoughts**

This paper has attempted to explore the vision for advancement, its recent history, the opportunities and the potential challenges the aacs faces in making it 'work'. Advancement is aspirational. To

be fully realised, it requires not just individual behavioural change but workplace reform, providing flexibility which will facilitate and create opportunities for those for whom work may not have previously been an option. The current economic climate is perceived by many as a potential barrier, but John Denham<sup>37</sup> is confident that recent changes make the role of the service even more important. The universality of the service offers benefits to every individual and opportunities to engage in personalised, accessible and local provision. Advancement is a long-term investment involving considerable culture change for individuals, employers and the agencies that serve them. As such its benefits will accrue over the medium to long term. It is an admirable principle, which needs to be nurtured and remain as the centrepiece of government policy in this area. In doing so it will be important to ensure that individuals, employers and government have shared aspirations as well as responsibilities in equal measure.

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

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