

Edtech solutions for the careers strategy

Blog post by Practice Lead Tom Smith, 19 December 2017

The latest sale process for Thomas International, a psychometric and aptitude assessment provider, is well timed to coincide with the UK government's publication this month of its long-awaited careers strategy, which looks to rejuvenate a previously neglected area of education policy and could be a platform for growth in much-hyped 'edtech' provision.

Independent careers advice services were effectively defunded through the programme of public spending retrenchment introduced in 2010. Schools were subsequently given the duty, but not necessarily the resources to continue providing impartial guidance. Influential stakeholders, from the National Audit Office to the education regulator Ofsted, have noted with concern in the intervening years that this approach has not been working. At best, schools struggled to provide the expertise to design effective careers advice, at worst they had a vested financial interest in retaining as many pupils as possible on their own A-level programmes.

Amidst its recent enthusiasm for industrial strategy and technical education, the government has responded, publishing a [strategy paper](#) outlining its ambitions for careers advice in the coming years. Employers will welcome this after having pointed to the paucity of the work readiness skills of those entering the labour market, whether from academic or technical routes, for some time. Whether it goes far enough, and builds sufficient links to the government's broader skills reforms, remains to be seen.

Nonetheless, the logical conclusion of the strategy's goals implies an increase in spending and, given schools' other priorities, an increase in the role of independent providers. Some of the models and techniques that have gained traction in the corporate training sector could, for example, now find a healthy new market in schools.

The strategy implies two changes; a focus on personalised guidance and far greater exposure to employers and employees from across the economy. Some schools will struggle to deliver these internally; assessment providers such as Thomas International should be well placed to deliver individualised support based on psychometric testing. Others, such as training providers, could leverage their relationships with employers to supply pupils with those encounters with employers the strategy calls for.

It's not only about reinvigorating an advice service that has been neglected in recent years. The bigger prize will be linking this pupil-centred approach with labour market and destinations data. An 'edtech' platform that can leverage this data into a format that satisfies pupils, parents and teachers - facilitating far better-informed decision making than at present - could be an even more lucrative commercial opportunity.

If government follows through on its intentions in the careers strategy, it will be creating demand for tailored, structured careers support. The big question is, who's going to meet this demand?