

Signposter is for individuals – an everyday tool for living, learning and earning!

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The Signposter Programme provides through its system, quick, electronic access to personalised information on a rich range of lifestyle choices, chief amongst which is information on learning and employment opportunities.

The i-portfolio (Intelligent Portfolio) is the heart of the search engine that draws down personalised information from a growing range of external information providers. It is owned by the individual, secure to the individual and the repository of the individual's personal information:

- This is a service free to all individuals, regardless of age or stage.
- It can be used without cost by organisations partnering with Signposter Ltd as an additional service they can provide for their clients or students or employees.
- It is for an individual to use throughout a lifetime of learning and development.
- The Signposter Programme does not see itself in competition with other portfolios or learning logs. They are for the most part relevant to a particular stage of a person's development (in school or in a company).
- There is no other system combining learning and employment with a range of other lifestyle choices and which is a tool for lifelong development.
- This is the only system that uses the personal information to drive the search engine, which returns increasingly personalised information the more the system knows of the individual.
- Signposter is for individuals rather than for organisations. But it will bring benefit to the organisations too. Signposter seeks partnerships, which would provide an added service to those systems and allow the individual to take their learning and development details through to the next stage.
- Beyond the significant database of portfolios, the Signposter

Programme will not build any databases of information. It has no need to; there are large numbers of fine databases in both the private and public sectors. The Signposter Programme is creating business partnerships with those information providers so that the Signposter search capability can access the information wanted for any transaction by an individual.

- The Signposter Programme is creating a powerful network; it has no interest in owning existing territory. It is a catalyst helping the individual to reach a rich range of personalised information.
- The Signposter Programme is built on a multi technology platform. Individuals will be able to access the system through PCs, PDAs, mobile telephones and digital TV.
- There is no intrusive advertising or marketing on the system beyond what individuals choose to access –

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and there is no direct access to any individual holding a portfolio on the system.

- At this early stage the focus has been on the 14 to 24-year-olds but the programme will be developing quickly to embrace all people at all ages.

The background to the Signposter programme

The Signposter Programme has been developed by FEeS Consultancy from around the year 2000 from the initial concept of Advancement that has its origins with UCAS. The focus of that original concept has remained steady and tight.

The original concept has been developed By FEeS Consultancy, who created Signposter Ltd, and icom Ltd, a media and technology company also

created specifically for this purpose, into the business concept called the Signposter Programme. FEeS has worked closely with UCAS, initially with the LSC and numerous other partners. Oracle has played a significant development role since the very early stages. Fujitsu have also been involved in the early stages. Nokia has more recently joined that partnership.

There is a confused and confusing part-provision of information provided by an increasing number of initiatives, some of which relate to each other but most of which do not. This led to the fourth recommendation of the *Morrison Report*, commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in July 2002 to create a network, which is coherent for the individual customer:

“A plethora of organisations and products exist to inform, guide and enable learners to progress. These include course information services, job search agencies, careers services and records of achievement. However, there is no single agency that rationalises all of these functions and delivers a single pathway that learners can take that begins at course registration and takes them right through into work. “Which Way?” is our working title for such a tool. We recommend that Government supports the development of a single learning-to-work support and guidance routemap.”

The 2004 *Which Way? Review* showed that not much had changed in the intervening two years.

We now have the important development of MIAP (Managing Information Across Partners), the IS-Index and e-portfolios.

But, because the fields of learning and employment are subject, in the former case, to being completely devolved and, in the latter case, to being partly devolved, and because the fields of learning and employment both spread far into the private sector, it would not make sense to conceive of a network centrally controlled by the Government in Whitehall.

The development of a national, virtual infrastructure of interlocking services would make sense if we could provide the most complete and

coherent access to information and advice on learning and employment opportunities for individuals throughout the UK and across the public and private sectors. The Signposter Programme will, we hope, play a significant part in the realisation of this concept.

What are the opportunities for the signposter programme?

In England we have a dysfunctional information, advice and guidance service – and we have never had such a service for individuals throughout their lifetime of development. More generally, we have lost the lifelong learning vision set out in 1998 by David Blunkett's *The Learning Age*. This is not the case in either Scotland or Wales. In both, lifelong learning remains the core principle of all developments in formal and informal learning; in Wales *The Learning Country* remains the touch point for all policy developments; in Scotland *Opportunity Scotland* has not only been fundamentally reviewed, but in March 2007 the Scottish Executive published *International Lifelong Learning: Scotland's Contribution*. In both these countries there are all-through guidance services – Careers Scotland and Careers Wales.

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Yet the provision of careers education is a statutory requirement in England under the Education Act 1997. However, there are no national requirements for the delivery or outcomes of careers education. Further there are no required qualifications or competences for careers teachers/co-ordinators. Two-thirds of careers staff in schools do not have any formal training or qualifications. In short, supporting young people to plan for their future has no status in education in England.

In England there is no intellectual leadership in this area of our national life. The Guidance Council could have provided that, but has now disbanded. CRAC is taking a strong position towards providing that.

Lord Leitch in his report *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills* has seen the need for a guidance service for adults to enhance the already fine service that has been developed by Learndirect. With the emphasis in Christine Gilbert's report *Learning 2020* on the personalising of learning, and with the development starting in September 2008 of the new specialised diplomas, we have an even greater need for a service, which provides information and advice and guidance.

In the Government's response on the implementation of Lord Leitch's report, published on 18 July 2007, it affirmed that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions will work together to create a joined up employment and skills system. The departments will merge the information and advice services of Learndirect and Next Stop providers into a new universal adult careers service in England working in partnership with JobCentre Plus. The new adult careers service will ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions and to get the support they need to advance themselves and achieve their full potential.

The remit for this new service is expected to be released in October 2007 and the service to be ready for the Autumn of 2009.

Signposter will be seeking also to link to the new TV service produced by the DWP's JobCentre Plus, in partnership with Looking Local, for anyone that has access to Sky, Cable or Broadband-enabled Freeview boxes. It will offer viewers the opportunity to view thousands of job vacancies at the touch of a button.

This initiative provides job seekers with another means of ensuring they can access the 400,000 jobs that job centres across the country are advertising.

The UK has the fifth largest economy, having been overtaken by China in the course of 2006. The UK is ninth in the productivity scales and is slipping. The UK is fifteenth in the ranking of GDP earned per head.

We have responded by raising levels of employment to compensate for the low productivity rates but we cannot go on doing that if we look at the demographic trend for 15 to 24 year-olds. As David Frost, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, has pointed out: “It is unsustainable to

import our way out of the failings of the UK education system.”

- Between 2001 and 2006 there has been a 6% increase, or 440,000 new people coming into the workforce.
- Between 2006 and 2011 that percentages drops to 0.6% or 50,000.
- From 2011 to 2016 there will be 290,000 fewer people, a drop of 3.4%
- Between 2016 and 2022 there will be a further drop of 260,000 young people or 3.4%

As Chris Humphries, Director General of City & Guilds, pointed out in March 2007:

- This drop in the number of teenagers combined with the normal rate of people retiring and the growth in the economy will mean a deficit of about 1.5 million workers based on estimates by the Office of National Statistics.
- It will be the first time in British history that employment growth is not filled by young people. We will have to bring a completely different group of people into the workforce who were not there before.
- New workers will have to be found among the 7.8 million economically inactive people, including carers and stay-at-home parents, the long-term sick and adult students.

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And the Chancellor who, with the Education Secretary, at a major conference in London in February 2007 to encourage businesses to sign the skills pledge, pointed out that in the future skills will be the only route to prosperity and jobs. Of 3.4 million unskilled jobs today, by 2020 we will need only 600,000.

David Freud's report for the Department of Work and Pensions, *Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: Options for the Future of Welfare to Work*, published in March 2007, set out the imperative to act: “To achieve its 80% aspiration, the Government will need to target its welfare strategy at tackling all of the inactive groups. It will require about one fifth of the ‘economically inactive’ population into work. This would include 300,000 lone parents (relative to a current population of 780,000

claiming Income Support); one million more older people in work (relative to 20 million people aged over 50 in total) and reducing the numbers claiming incapacity benefits by 1 million (relative to 2.68 million). It also has significant implications from the perspective of the most socially disadvantaged – the 3.1 million people who have been on benefits for more than a year. To achieve the 80 per cent figure would imply reducing that total by 1.3 million

people, or 42%”.

To get anywhere near addressing seriously these issues we have to have a system of providing information, advice and guidance to all individuals, at whatever age or stage, and which they can rely on throughout their lifetime of development.

By providing a UK-wide service free to all individuals of whatever age or stage and through not only computer but also mobile technology, the

Signposter Programme is seeking to play a significant role in these issues of demographic change and skills requirements. The Signposter Programme seeks to help enfranchise those not in employment, education or training specifically as well as provide the right inspiration for every individual at whatever level to understand and make the most of their potential.