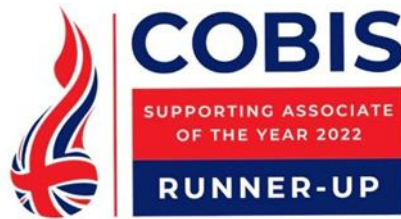


Connect, Reflect and Explore – Lessons from the 40th COBIS Annual Conference.



SPW Careers

As with all those who attended the 40th COBIS Annual Conference in London, SPW Careers enjoyed the many insightful sessions. The theme of the conference was Connect, Reflect & Explore, in that spirit we really enjoyed CONNECTING with schools, speakers and fellow exhibitors, here we thought we'd share some of our REFLECTIONS and EXPLORE what this means within International Careers, Education, Information, Advice & Guidance (CEIAG).

As a company which supports students and schools with all things CEIAG, through both directly working with students to our [Student Pathways](#) Membership, we were pleased and not surprised to hear from ISC Research how parents focus on outcomes (often pathways to university) as one of the key elements why they choose which international school to send their children. Indeed, we learnt that a key element of selecting an English taught education in school is the ambition to attend an English taught university, be that in the UK, USA, Australia, etc. Kim Lynch Business Development Manager at ISC Research also highlighted the importance to both parents and schools of 'wellbeing' and highlighted careers guidance / counselling as a factor within this.

This reminded us how the work of a qualified career adviser goes beyond exploring options; there is lots of evidence which links careers guidance and mental health and student wellbeing: Dr Peter Robertson, associate professor at Edinburgh Napier University; *"It's not symptom-focused and it's not meant to be therapy, but some things that are a natural part of careers guidance are also part of promoting positive wellbeing,"* explains Robertson. *"You're sitting down with someone, taking an interest and trying to help them solve problems and imagine a future which is better than the present. You're injecting a bit of optimism and getting people to look at their strengths, rather than mulling over the negatives."* Within our work with the British School of Paris, which was recognised by COBIS during the conference and awarded runner-up in the COBIS Associate of the Year 2022, we witnessed first-hand the difference careers guidance can make; *'I have certainly picked up a general buzz of conversation about the future from our students and in speaking to individuals, I think your work has been a massively important motivator for them, especially given events over the last few months. There is a future after all!'* Head of Year British School of Paris.



Vivienne Stern MBE, Director Universities UK International, continued this theme touching on how Careers Guidance for international schools / students is becoming a key factor in not only supporting the UK economy and reputation but broader around ensuring students are making the right decisions about studying around the world. This was quickly followed by Lizzie Burrows from Imperial College, Juan Arellano New York University & Colum Cronin Dublin City University all exploring the idea of the key to a successful application is a student 'understanding themselves' indeed as Lizzie put it 'It's all about best fit, be honest to yourself.' All four promoting the idea of early guidance in both supporting students, but also educating parents about 'best fit'

During the conference had many 1-1 conversations that highlighted the importance of careers guidance and how this is becoming more dominate within school assessments, but beyond assessment how students in schools are applying for an ever-widening range of options and the challenges this has for schools (learning the application systems, university networks, etc). Plus, a wonderful quote from a school in the middle-east (I didn't get permission, so I won't name them), *'finding a good careers counsellor (adviser) is hard they are rarer than hens' teeth!'*

CEIAG is often misunderstood and therefore undervalued by many school leaders. The message we would want to share is that CEIAG is way more than university applications and university prep. In 'How to find the career you've always wanted' Jonathan Black, reflects that a Noble Prize winner described how he thought of his career as a sailing trip *'a career is a series of jobs that you have to tack between, to and fro, from one to another, beating against the wind to get where you want; you can't always go straight for the dock on the other side of the bay you do actually have to put the sails up and leave the harbour; you can't just stay tied up thinking of all the many places that you could or might sail to.'*

Supporting students to make the right decisions, explore the many pathways open to them and indeed to set sail, is key within Careers Guidance. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) "Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers" (OECD, 2004, p.19) * Liane Hambley; reflected on this on a presentation for the Career Development Institute (UK) and summed up the role of a career adviser perfectly (paraphrased here) *'Good careers guidance is often a mix of more directive elements of advice & information; where you might instruct, give advice, suggest and give feedback, the less directive elements of coaching; asking questions to raise awareness and summarising and non-directive elements of counselling; paraphrasing, reflecting and listening.'*

**References: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2004), Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap, Paris.*

When explaining the value of the support offered by qualified career advisers (be that internal or external qualified advisers) to schools, [SPW Careers](#) often use the role of music tutors to illustrate how a career adviser fits and is distinct from others in school who may support careers. A music

tutor is often a highly skilled and qualified specialist, specifically brought into school to offer 1-1 support in helping students to reach their full potential, often adding value to the work undertaken by the music department. Likewise, a qualified career adviser brings their knowledge and experience in adding value to the wider / generic career curriculum and university support in school, again with the aim of enabling students to realise their full potential.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed first-hand the rise in understanding of the importance and benefits of CEIAG and it was wonderful for this to be confirmed by so many of the speakers at the COBIS Conference, and by SPW Careers being awarded COBIS Associate of the Year 2022 runners-up. Not only are we very proud as a company but also for all those supporting CEIAG within international schools. Often misunderstood and therefore undervalued by many school leaders, we encourage all schools to reflect on the great value a strong Careers Curriculum (starting early in school) can have on your school and the young people who pass through.

Written by Mark Smith, Founder/Director SPW Careers.

[SPW Careers](#) company ethos 'to work with schools and colleges who truly see the value of high-quality careers education and guidance in supporting their students to become active and successful global citizens' continues to be at the forefront of everything we do in supporting schools to improve their careers guidance and provide a careers programme which is bench-marked against internationally recognised standards of excellence.

For more information on how [SPW Careers](#) can support the CEIAG in your school or about our new [Student Pathways](#) membership offer please do contact enquiries@spwcareers.com or alternatively marksmith@spwcareers.com