

Managing career learning – RIP! or what?

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Finding time for designing, developing and managing careers work can seem a bit of a luxury when all too often the name of the game seems like survival. With new partnerships and new curriculum frameworks on the horizon, and attention to curriculum integration with enterprise and work-related learning as a requirement – to name just some of the everyday demands – there is quite sufficient to keep the best minds out of mischief.

Management for coherence and progression can seem a far cry from this everyday world of the careers co-ordinator.

Getting to grips with such a re-think of careers work was the focus for a fifteen-month career-development project in the London Borough of Islington from 2004 – 2005. The work, now complete in its first development stage, involved 8 institutions: an 11-18 school, three 11-16 schools, two special schools, a work-based learning provider, and the local further education and sixth form college. The brief was to rescue careers work from the margins – bring it in from the cold – and enable it to be, and to be seen as, a central feature of the main curriculum. That work has been written about elsewhere (McGowan, 2006b) – this is about the model that emerged for managing the development of career learning.



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Change in careers work is not optional – QCA are engaged currently in a re-think of the role and place of careers work in the curriculum, with implications for learning design and delivery. Even without this imperative, most careers work merits a health check from time to time – often recognised but rarely undertaken in a world of constant initiatives. Offered here is a simple matrix – a 9-faceted framework arranged as 3 x 3 – for taking a look at what is happening in careers work, for responding to change, and making sure that the work always reflects what young people need.

The RIP model:

R ationale: What is the nature and scope of careers work?	R elevance: How can we be sure we are meeting the needs of young people?	R elationships: How and where can new activity link with existing work?
I deas: What new ideas are there for this work?	I nfrastructure: What is in place to support this work?	I nfluence: Who can best promote and enable this work?
P reparation: What needs to be done?	P lanning: How can we ensure sustainability?	P reparation: What needs to be done?

No elements are stand-alone; all depend for their efficacy on their relationship with the others. However, working with any one of the nine features can help to anchor career learning and strengthen the career offer to young people.

Working with all nine features was an enormous challenge for the Islington schools, but those who engaged with it discovered it was a way of 'eating the elephant in bite-sized chunks' – and it worked.

The rationale for the RIP model is presented below: the support for managing it into action appears elsewhere (McGowan, 2006c). Its relevance to the current changing situation of careers work is highlighted.

The first strand – 3Rs:

This strand is like the bedrock of the work – establishing the foundations. Without some attention to the issues here, it is very difficult to be confident that other features of the work are sufficiently focused, coherent and can offer learning that will support sustainable choice.

Finding a Rationale: what is the nature and scope of careers work?

Answering this question is becoming increasingly important as the contexts in which careers work is being developed and delivered are changing. Careers work is not designed, developed and delivered in isolation; it is most effective through partnerships with those who share a common focus and values, but those partners are shifting, and partnerships are metamorphosing into new configurations.

Credible, collaborative partnership work and development needs consensus about the proper concerns of careers work, at least within the institution, and with the staff of the agencies with which it works – especially Connexions or its equivalent, and increasingly the Local Authority and local Children's Trusts. Without this consensus collaboration is difficult; it is hard to integrate clear role functions, and parallel, complementary and mutually supportive activities.

If partners do not thoughtfully identify points of convergence, young people can be exposed to fragmented experience and even ambiguity, instead of experiencing coherence from the support they receive.

There are several frameworks for supporting this kind of discussion; for example, the QCA three-fold framework of Career Exploration, Career Management and Self-development. Bill Law's CPI framework (CLN, 2005) of Coverage, Process and Influence, makes links with the QCA framework above, but offers a much developed model for scoping career learning, with a comprehensively worked rationale. Attention to some credible, thoughtful underpinning, whatever its origin, is crucial for professionalism, coherence and collaboration.

Demonstrating Relevance: how can we be sure we are meeting the needs of young people?

The National Framework 11-19 (DfES, 2003) suggests a cluster of learning outcomes for Key Stages 3, 4 and post-16; and this is a useful starting point from which to examine needs. However, these general, recommended learning outcomes need to be evaluated against the complex and varied realities of the local situation, and of the individual and often challenging circumstances of many young people.

Most career programmes involve a great deal of effort, resources, time and expertise. But the only certain way to know that the career offer is relevant, i.e. it responds to experienced needs, is to conduct a needs analysis for a specific group of young people. Making generalised assumptions may not be as accurate a reflection of young people's perspectives as may be supposed; and variables occur from one catchment area to another.

Without establishing this level of relevance it is difficult to know that what is being offered is effectively supporting the young people who are receiving it, at the time they need it, and that scarce resources are being used well.

Professional experience can create a first draft framework of learning needs relevant to the local context, which may usefully draw on the National Framework mentioned above. But this needs to be tested for validity by sharing it with 'significant others' – a group which may include colleagues who are careers specialists, and those who are not, young people, parents, governors and local employers. The aim is to share what is proposed, enquire whether others agree or disagree – and find out why – and collect other suggestions. More points of view can add richness and depth to the thinking, and can verify – or not – the initial professional suggestions for the learning. Once established this baseline can be kept under review, and used as the foundation for programme design and development. This, or another method of ensuring relevance, is not optional – young people need to be able to recognise and value the support we offer.

Establishing Relationships: how and where can new activity link with existing work?

All development work needs to identify and build on what is already usefully happening – and in most cases there is probably more than is immediately recognised.

Those responsible for the career offer frequently feel they are working in isolation, on the margins of the main curriculum and its concerns. Establishing agreement on a framework of career learning outcomes for young people, that is known to reflect need, offers a strong basis for mapping sources of existing and potential support. It can be used to canvass support from those colleagues who are sympathetic to the purposes of careers work, and who are working in other areas across and beyond the subject curriculum.

An integrated approach raises awareness of the nature of career learning in a wider arena; enables the person responsible for careers work to co-ordinate the learning; and encourages curriculum support.

Sharing such a baseline can help colleagues to identify where and on what terms they can, and are willing to help. It is a way of knowing where what they are doing already supports this learning, and what else might be done, either differently or additionally. Backing from everyone, even when they are interested, is very unlikely – but some collaboration is highly probable. The larger the network of curriculum partners, the greater the chance that all young people will be enabled to engage with the learning.

It is critical for coherence that career learning consolidates as well as innovates.

The three features above – rationale, relevance and relationships are mutually dependent. Without a clear rationale, it is difficult to establish what might be useful learning for young people: without a understanding of what is relevant there can be no basis for curriculum collaboration; and without knowing who is contributing what to career learning it is hard to build coherence for young people, however comprehensive the understanding of scope and need.

The second strand – 3Is:

This is where the work interfaces with the institution – the public appearance of career learning. Without some attention to the issues raised in this strand it is difficult to be confident that the work has curriculum status and institutional recognition.

Exploring Ideas: what new ideas are there for this work?

There is probably a fair degree of unanimity about the key tasks for careers work:

- in many settings, to encourage the majority of young people to see themselves as having more extensive opportunities than their immediate family or community setting might support or suggest;

and

- in all settings, to enable young people to access appropriate career relevant learning to make and implement sustainable decisions within these wider horizons.

New thinking with and beyond the frameworks here will not be optional in the near future: QCA are developing a coherent framework of personal development learning. This does not merely re-position where careers work is located, it demands some new thinking about how it will be developed and delivered in a new context.

Without some willingness and ability to engage with developmental thinking, new ideas and different ways of doing things, there is no new territory to move into and the status quo remains.

There are existing tools and frameworks for exploring ideas for career learning, for example the QCA framework of self-development, career exploration and career management referred to above, and its translation into a cluster of learning outcomes in the *National Framework for Careers Education* (DfES, 2003). A more developed approach can be found in Bill Law's much extended and developed DOTS framework, CPI: **Coverage** – **what** young people need to know; **Process** – **how** we can help them to deal with what they find out; and **Influence** – **who** and what is affecting them as they plan for their future (CLN, 2005).

Whatever the starting point, change is currently high profile and inevitable in the field of personal and career learning. Without some visible engagement with developmental thinking, career learning is in danger of both institutional and client invisibility.

Reviewing the Infrastructure: what is in place to support this work?

A key strength for careers work, both now and in the future, is the extent to which there is an effective organisational and management infrastructure to support its delivery.

Careers work needs to be managed from a significant middle-management position; and the work needs to be carried out in a manner similar to any other mainstream area of the curriculum. This brings with it the need to respond to hard accountabilities, as well as offering negotiating strength and flexibility.

Managing career learning in this context means negotiating collaborative partnerships within and beyond the curriculum; identifying and agreeing who will do what, either with traditionally career-relevant roles like tutor teams, or with new and different colleagues. It means a curriculum plan that is reviewed and evaluated at least on an annual basis; with teaching and learning methods that support a variety of learning styles. It means effective

leadership for both staff and curriculum, and an ability to interface with and contribute to school development planning, including budgeting and training. It means being willing to be accountable for targets and outcomes.

Without this commitment to investment in an infrastructure of good practice it is very difficult to establish any status or, to some degree, credibility for careers work. All other curriculum areas are required to operate in this manner, and failure to institute the same kind of order and profile for careers work undermines it.

There are undoubtedly some real issues for individuals related to levels of resourcing and institutional ethos. But where 'careers' is a recognisably responsible and status-holding role for the individual, it generates motivation, commitment, and a sense of empowerment to communicate with confidence with senior managers.

Accessing Influence: who can best promote and enable this work?

This is an important key to any sustainable development of careers work. It is usually thought that senior leadership support is critical for careers work, but equally crucial is professional authority:

- the *role* authority of senior managers is a significant factor in the ability of the careers co-ordinator – and other partners – to influence the institutional development of careers work;
- equally the *professional* authority of the careers co-ordinator is critical if there is to be any informed and sustainable development.

Careers work needs both kinds of authority to prosper; if one is missing it makes no significant difference on the overall impact of career learning as to which one that is. New partnerships and the need to negotiate new pathways for career guidance provision will make serious demands on the need for both strong role and professional authority.

It is crucial for the health of career learning that schools have the ability to bring both role and professional authority to discussions about career provision in the future. Some of these negotiations will be with external partners who may be changing, and who may not have engaged in these kinds of discussion before. A clear understanding of what is needed, and the basis on which it will be available to the institution, from whom and when, will require leadership inputs from both the senior leadership group and the professional careers coordinator. Less than effective internal partnerships here can seriously detract from the development of internal and external learning opportunities for young people.

The three features above – ideas, infrastructure and influence – are mutually dependent. Without some good ideas, there is no new ground to move into; without an effective underpinning of good practice, there is no supporting context in which good ideas can be nurtured; without access to institutional support, it is hard to achieve any substantial recognition for, and embedding of, any development, however good the thinking.

The third strand – the 3Ps:

This is concerned with the operational aspects of careers work – the practical tasks that must be tackled for careers work to have substance. Without some attention to the issues raised in this strand, it is very difficult to have confidence in the robustness and sustainability of the career offer.

Effective Preparation: what needs to be done?

Any periodic reflection on how careers work might be developed, whether to respond to local needs or national initiatives, needs to begin by establishing some clarity about what is already there. It is critical that this is a well-thought-through process; the thoroughness with which this is tackled will help to determine how robustly any new activity is anchored and integrated.

The new QCA curriculum framework for personal development learning will become the working document for integrating careers work into the curriculum. Looking for links and connections to existing work, and exploring potential for development will be critical steps in the successful implementation of career learning in this new context.

Any significant review of the career offer needs to look at both provision and management. Examining only provision will provide a picture of what is there, but may not offer sufficient comment on its depth, quality and sustainability. Reviewing how the learning is managed will provide a perspective on the anchor points, the extent of institutional commitment that can be accessed, who is involved, and on what terms. It can be helpful to conduct this as a professional discussion between key people, both inside and outside the institution; this is more likely to attract support for any subsequent action.

Any proposed change benefits from some reflection on its links and connections. Any significant shift in responsibilities and structures, such as may now be emerging in some local areas, requires a more systematic approach. Various tools for review and evaluation are available: this approach is implicit in some of the career award schemes; CEGNET has the Improving Quality Checklist available; and the work in Islington used a DIY approach through self-review frameworks – What you are doing and How you are managing it.

Building Partnerships: who needs to be involved?

The career offer to young people depends on effective partnerships; it is not easily developed and delivered either by a single person, or in one curriculum area. But building useful partnerships can be a challenge.

Internal partnerships can strongly support coherence in student learning, but they are vulnerable if colleagues have insufficient understanding and/or commitment to careers work – for example, tutors can be conscripts and not volunteers! Other collaborating partnerships may be strong and effective, but may not be able to offer support to a whole year group – for example, planned learning opportunities in collaboration with humanities staff at Key Stage 4. Frequently, the quality of the outcomes is affected by the strength of the professional relationships, and the commitment this generates; and the robustness of the management procedures, including resources, that are in place to underpin the work.

External partnerships can contribute expertise that is difficult for internal staff to offer – like market-related information. However, there is the danger that an external partner may not have a strong alignment with the school's focus and priorities, or share a mutual understanding of the nature and value of aspects of the work. In addition, there can be mundane challenges for external partners, like those around working with younger people, and accommodating the rigid requirements of the school organisation – timetables and terms. Frequently, the outcomes are affected by the robustness of the contracting process, and the clarity of the initial agreements; and the management structures in place to support the initial negotiations, and to offer sufficient backing to sustain the commitments.

When partnerships can be made to work well, they bring benefits to both partners and clients: in professional support/colleagueship; wealth and diversity of contribution; and the capacity to respond more dynamically, immediately and holistically to the career needs of young people and their families.

Effective and sustainable partnerships need time to build a common understanding of the work, and mutual trust. They require individuals with high levels of knowledge and expertise; and a strong underpinning of management and planning systems, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

New partnerships with some different individuals and/or organisations are part of the future – both internally and externally to institutions.

Sequencing Planning: how can we ensure sustainability?

New and different demands in the world of career learning – new partnerships, different colleagues and an altered curriculum frame – are going to require adjustment and change in curriculum, staff and organisational arrangements.

Managing sustainable change means recognising the interdependence of these aspects. Curriculum change can put pressure on staff and structures to accommodate difference, for which they may be unprepared and/or resistant. Professional development of staff is needed to build capacity to respond positively and effectively, and enhance individual motivation. Equally, the implications for the organisation's structure and planning need to be identified from the beginning so that new 'demands' can be integrated, rather than emerging as a thorn in the side later.

Whatever changes are initiated and planned for, it is essential that they are both manageable and sustainable. This takes resource – time, effort, expertise – and the means to make a commitment for their future. Where planning is weak, underdeveloped and/or under resourced, little advance will be made.

The need for change and development in careers work is an inevitability. There is curriculum change emerging from QCA; workforce re-modelling in progress as more non-teachers are employed as careers co-ordinators; and differing accountabilities within the Ofsted framework.

Managing careers work in the increasingly complex context of existing and emerging partnerships is becoming a very significant aspect of the work of the careers- co-ordinator; the title 'careers work manager' (Andrews, 2004) may be more appropriate for the kind of responsibilities involved.

The three features here – preparation, partnerships and planning – have a similarly interdependent relationship as in the other strands. Without sufficient preparation, learning opportunities available through later planning and collaborative partnerships lack strong foundations; without careful planning, the potential from effective preparation and the variety of learning experiences offered through partners may be lost; and without effective partnerships the capacity to offer extended learning opportunities is much diminished, however substantial the preparation and planning for the rest of the work.

The RIP model outlined above can be used in whole or part as a tool for revisiting aspects of career learning as they find their way into the melting pot. It can act as a framework for evaluating new initiatives and packages. It

has a role in fulfilling the on-going responsibilities of an annual health-check on the career offer. And it can be used to support a root and branch re-think of how to manage the development of career learning.

Working with this agenda may bring professional development implications for a wider range of colleagues. These could include senior managers as well as specialist careers staff, and others who find themselves in roles where they must respond to the world of career learning – a new world that brings different demands and possibilities, resources and accountabilities, and partners and commitments.

This looks like the future for careers work.

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