

Geoff Ford: An Obituary



Geoff Ford died in his sleep on Thursday 24 January 2008. He was 69. He had been in hospital for some weeks, suffering from a variety of liver and other problems.

Geoff read philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) at Oxford, and subsequently trained as a careers officer at Swanley. After practising as a careers officer in the London Borough of Ealing, he was Principal Careers Officer for

Leeds from 1970 to 1984. Subsequently he was responsible for pioneering adult guidance services in Leeds, before joining the Employment Department as a Training Standards Inspector. On leaving the Department in late 1993 he became a self-employed consultant specialising in career guidance and related issues. In 1995 he was elected a NICEC Fellow, which he remained until he was elected an Emeritus Fellow a few weeks before his death.

Geoff was responsible for a great deal of innovative development work in the field of career guidance, particularly for adults. He played an important role in the establishment of the Counselling and Career Development Unit at the University of Leeds, and in 1984 wrote a significant report for them on *Meeting the Educational, Training and Counselling Needs of Adults*. This led to his joining the UDACE Development Group on adult guidance, where his wise contributions assisted in the drafting of the 1986 report *The Challenge of Change*. But he also had great interest in young people, particularly those at risk, and his evaluation of the Institute of Career Guidance Mentoring Action Project was an important piece of work at a time when the needs of such young people were being largely neglected.

It was however his later work on guidance for older adults – for the ‘third age’ – that was his most distinctively significant contribution to the field. He was responsible for a series of reports – including *Career Guidance in the Third Age: a Mapping Exercise* (1996), *Challenging Age* (2003) and *Am I Still Needed?* (2005) – that were genuinely groundbreaking, not only in the UK but internationally. Issues relating to active ageing and phased retirement are now being increasingly recognised as critical policy issues in most developed countries. It was largely Geoff’s work, linked to NICEC, CeGS and the Third Age Employment Network (TAEN), which established and documented the critical role that guidance services can play in relation to such issues.

Geoff was passionately committed to the role that good-quality career guidance can play in helping people to develop and sometimes transform their lives. He had a deep concern for disadvantaged people, young and old. But he also saw the importance of addressing their distinctive needs within universal services that addressed the needs of all, on a lifelong basis.

All his work was characterised by total integrity and dedication. His research was diligent and painstakingly thorough. His knowledge of his field was encyclopaedic, and the main difficulty he experienced in his writing was deciding what to leave out. The clarity of his thinking and the range and depth of his experience shone through all his written work.

He was a true gentleman, in both senses of that word. He was unfailingly courteous to all he met, no matter who they were. He was also a generous colleague, always willing to give his time to help and mentor others. His modesty, his warmth, his wisdom and his humanity were gifts he gave to all of us who knew him, and which remain to inspire us through our memories of his life.

Tony Watts