

Enhancing professionalism – progressing the career development sector

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Much has changed in the career development sector since the launch of the Careers Profession Task Force report, 'Towards a Strong Careers Profession' in 2010. The report made recommendations for enhancing the professionalism of the career sector including the establishment of an overarching professional body, new qualification levels and common professional standards. The Careers Profession Alliance (CPA) and then the Career Development Institute (CDI), launched in April 2013 have striven to facilitate the sector to be stronger and more cohesive by addressing these recommendations. This article explores what was needed, what has been achieved and plans for the future.



Introduction

Following publication of the Task Force report, the Vice Chair, Professor Rachel Mulvey wrote an article for the NICEC Journal (Mulvey, 2011) and quoted the Chair, Dame Ruth Silver, as having described the sector as 'tentacular', Mulvey goes on to state that,

the landscape really is very complex: it runs along a spectrum of provision from youth to any age, by way of targeted groups needing particular attention; it includes people in education – secondary, further, vocational, professional and higher and training (off and on the job) and those not in education or training with provision ranging from formal publically funded services to informal grass roots activities either of which may experience management by target or by self-regulation (2011: 6).

This acknowledges the complexity of the sector and specifically that career development services were

offered by people from a range of organisations and with differing qualifications and job titles. What was needed was a means of unifying the sector through focus on commonality, enhancing professional standards through defining a recognised minimum level of qualification, establishing a common code of ethical practice and an explicit commitment to continuous professional development (CPD). This would provide those outside the sector with a better understanding as to what professional career development offers. It would also support those within it to understand what being a career development professional means and how this status could be achieved maintained and enhanced.

'Towards a Strong Profession' (CPTF, 2010) contained a series of 14 recommendations. Although aspirational these aimed to provide a framework that would support the sector moving forward and to take responsibility for itself. This article examines the progress that has been made since the launch of the report in 2010; it is not possible to address all of the recommendations in depth so we focus on those recommendations addressing unification and standardisation within the sector.

What was needed: Starting to tame the tentacles

The recommendations focused on the need for cohesion, increased professionalism, progression and continuous professional development (CPD) across the sector:

- Establishing an overarching group of professional bodies as a single authoritative voice;
- Developing common professional standards and a common code of ethics, leading in time, to the

establishment of a Register of Practice for careers professionals;

- Establishing minimum entry level qualification for careers professionals of QCF Level 6 and a commitment to Continuous Professional Development (CPD);
- Transition arrangements for those practising below Level 6;
- Development of a single career progression framework including a work-based route;
- Demonstration of a commitment to Continuous Professional Development;
- Initial training and CPD to include a focus on LMI and STEM; and
- Random sampling of self-declared minimum level of CPD.

Further recommendations addressed working to improve practice within school, colleges and work-based learning:

- Maintenance and strengthening of the careers education and guidance partnership model;
- Overarching national kite mark to validate the different CEIAG awards;
- The need for providers of career guidance in schools, colleges and work-based learning to meet a nationally approved quality standard; and
- Sharing of good practice.

Finally they related to quality assurance and reporting on progress:

- Thematic reviews by Ofsted;
- Government commissioned reports on progress towards achievements of the recommendations.

An early priority for the sector was to continue with the establishment of the overarching group combining the four main membership bodies: Association of Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG); Association of Careers Professionals International (ACPI); Institute for Career Guidance (ICG) and the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA)¹. This work had already been started by the Careers Profession Alliance (CPA) and over the following years these bodies came together into a single professional body for the career development

¹ The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) had withdrawn from the CPA in 2012.

sector across the UK, the Career Development Institute (CDI) which was launched on 1st April 2013. This bringing together of four of the major bodies established a new era for career development within the UK. It provided the opportunity for all career development practitioners to see themselves as having more in common than they have of difference. This was something that had been demanded for some time (Neary-Booth and Peck, 2009). Finally the sector had a unified voice to represent practitioners.

Standardising the sector

The CDI inherited from the CPA the Blueprint for the Register of Career Development Professionals and Career Progression Framework (2012) which:

- described the context within which a national Register of Career Development Professionals and career progression framework (CPF) had been developed by the CPA;
- set out a model for a professional standards framework for the CPA/successor body within which the Register of Career Development Professionals and associated CPF would sit;
- set out a blueprint for the national Register of Career Development Professionals including the qualification and competency requirements for the register.

This became the UK Register for Career Development Professionals and clearly set out the requirements for being a recognised career development professional including adherence to a code of ethics and a commitment to a minimum of 25 hours CPD a year. A challenge for standardisation of the qualification criterion for the register was the plethora of qualifications and particularly the levels of qualifications on offer.

The ICG was previously the awarding body for the Qualification in Career Guidance/Development which is offered within a Master's degree or Post Graduate Diploma, set at QCF level 7/SCQF level 11. The CDI took over this awarding body function as part of its inheritance. Outside of the work of the CPA, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) the then sector skills council developed the work-based qualifications for the sector, QCF Level 3 Award in Supporting Clients to Overcome Barriers to Learning and Work, QCF

Level 4 Diploma in Career Information and Advice and QCF Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development. This meant that there was now also a more comparable work-based pathway available at a higher level which provided the transition arrangements to the professional qualification level for the sector. However this only addressed the practice of one part of the career development sector, career advisers.

The CDI is a UK-wide professional association whose membership covers: career advisers, career educators, career coaches and talent managers as well as those working in supporting, administrative, research and managerial roles in the sector. The challenge was therefore to establish cohesion across a diverse sector, across the UK, and to recognise the full range of relevant qualifications as well as the vast experience of those people without qualifications.

In developing the register the CPA had, through necessity, begun with the qualifications held by the majority of practitioners and hence it was very career guidance centric. Since the appointment of the CDI Professional Development Manager in January 2014 work has taken place with the Professional Standards Committee to broaden the range of qualifications at QCF Level 6 or above/SCQF Level 11 (Scotland) which are accepted for registration. These now include those held by career educators as well as those by career coaches and talent managers. The register has provided the medium, through which all career development practitioners can be recognised as professionals, it contributes to a collective professional identity and standardises and promotes relevant qualification levels for the sector. Encouragingly the number of people on the register has risen from just over 200 in April 2013 to over 1200 in April 2015. This represents over a quarter of the current CDI membership.

Importantly, the broadening of the range of qualifications accepted also extends the sector by recognising occupations that align with career development. This allows members of other professional associations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the British Psychological Society (BPS), to regard themselves as part of the careers profession and join the CDI's Register.

As with all new organisations, developments can take time. The qualifications have been addressed and the next stage is to explore opportunities for recognising those people with extensive experience but who lack the relevant qualifications. The CDI is working to address this and to support practitioners to prove the value of their experience and have this acknowledged for the purposes of gaining entry to the register. The development of the National Occupational Standards: Career Development (NOS: CD) (CDI, 2014a) provides the ideal vehicle for addressing this.

In January 2014 the CDI won guardianship from UKCES of the National Occupational Standards: Career Development (NOS: CD). Their subsequent revision and publication in November 2014 means that they can now be used to describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform all of the functions at any level of role across the sector. This is highly important as it provides a common language which benchmarks the various roles within career development and offers clarity to practitioners and employers as to the activities defined within career development practice. Throughout the coming year the CDI will be providing training events for managers on how to use the NOS: CD, as well as a Resource Guide (CDI, 2015a), targeted at employers, which shows how the NOS: CD can be used to support practitioners to deliver effective services to clients. Using the NOS effectively will contribute to the ongoing professionalisation and CPD within the sector by encouraging a standardised, consistent and quality approach to workforce recruitment and development as well as organisational performance management.

Progression

An issue for many practitioners has been a lack of understanding as to what career opportunities are available in the career sector and what they need in order to progress their career. To address this a Career Development Sector Progression Pathway (CDI, 2015b) has now been developed which defines the:

- three main branches of the sector (career education; career guidance/development and career coaching/talent management);
- levels of role within each branch (first contact; support, practitioner, specialist practitioner; research/technical; manager, senior manager and

specialist role – lecturer/consultant/inspectorate);

- common functions of each role based on the NOS: CD or other relevant NOS; and
- qualifications required for each role.

Crucially this means that it is possible now for practitioners working at different levels to see how to progress to the qualification level required for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals. It also allows the CDI as the professional body for the sector to state the qualification level required for professional practice and thus meet the recommendation made in the Careers Profession Task Force report.

The Pathway also provides the opportunity for the CDI to emphasise the need to use common job titles for the professional roles, e.g. Career Adviser; Career Coach. The plethora of job titles identified in ‘Understanding a ‘career in careers’’ (Neary, Marriott and Hooley, 2014) showed 103 different job titles used in the sector. The issues in relation to job title are generally a concern in the UK; elsewhere in the world the term career counsellor is more generally recognised. Moreover, the Pathway provides an opportunity to promote both consistency within job titles and differentiation between job roles. The Pathway provides greater clarity supporting members of the public to see what qualifications to expect from those providing career development services; employers to see what level of qualification should be held and practitioners to see how to progress through their own career.

Maintaining professional standards

Maintaining professional standards is crucial to any profession. Professional practice is not just about having the relevant qualifications; CPD is a vital component which ensures practice is current and up to date. Engagement with CPD is assessed annually for 10% of the register by the CDI Professional Development Manager for quality assurance purposes. Failure to fulfil this requirement, without good reason, results in removal from the register.

Engagement with CPD is a cornerstone of professional practice and enhances both professional identity of the individual practitioner and the professional status of the sector (Neary, 2014). Demonstrating commitment

to CPD is a requirement for membership of the CDI and Register. Advances in technology now mean that meeting the CPD requirement can be done in a variety of ways. This is of particular importance to professionals for whom the time or finance required for CPD can be a challenge, either because of targeted delivery methods or the parameters of self-employed practice. To help practitioners the CDI offers a range of CPD opportunities including webinars. It also supports interest groups and has a thriving set of Communities of Interest which are LinkedIn based and enable career educators, independent coaches and consultants, practitioners working with clients who have learning difficulties and disabilities, researchers, students and HE practitioners to meet virtually and share good practice, ideas and expertise. National groups of practitioners also meet in Wales and Scotland as well as regional groups across England. All of these contribute to promoting the commonality of practice and to building the knowledge and expertise of those committed to developing their professional practice.

The partnership with NICEC has also provided new opportunities for CPD for practitioners. This approach has enabled NICEC and CDI members to meet and learn about recent research from across the sector and reflect on how skills and knowledge can be applied. The availability of the NICEC Journal, which is free to CDI members, also means that practitioners can learn more about professional practice both in the UK and abroad. This relationship provides practitioners with the opportunity to engage with research and to, hopefully, contribute to the evidence base which informs developing practice.

Abiding by the CDI Code of Ethics (CDI, 2014b) is another criterion for registration and the Code of Ethics developed by the CPA was updated by the Professional Standards Committee in October 2014 to make it more accessible to, and relevant for, both members of the public and employed and self-employed practitioners. A Discipline and Complaints Procedure has also been established.

Where next?

‘Towards a strong careers profession’ (CPTF, 2010) was originally conceived to set out a vision for the careers workforce working with young people. It concluded that the findings were applicable to all parts

of the careers profession. Ironically, we now have a service for adults but a fragmented and weakened service for young people. In 2013 Ofsted conducted a thematic review which identified that three-quarters of schools are not providing impartial careers advice, the guidance for schools was not sufficiently explicit and that there is a lack of opportunity for young people to engage with employers. Some of these issues are being addressed, we do not have the space here to explore this in more detail; however the CDI is committed to supporting the career development workforce for young people and much is being done.

Recognising the important role played by career educators and how this role works in partnership with those professionals providing career guidance, was identified as one of the recommendation in the Careers Profession Task Force report. The role of the career educator has however, become increasingly challenged but is increasingly important. The Government's failure to mention career guidance delivered by qualified professionals or the role of the CDI in the Statutory Guidance 'Career Guidance and Inspiration in Schools' (DfE, 2014), although disheartening for professionals working in the sector, only led to renewed efforts to make its voice heard. The subsequent guidance 'Career Guidance and Inspiration in Schools' (DfE, 2015) has since addressed this and recognised the role of the CDI in setting and maintaining professional standards. Also the Quality in Career Standard (QiCS), (Careers England, 2012) which provides national validation for the range of careers education, information, advice and guidance awards in England has also been acknowledged and reinforces the importance of structured and managed approaches to career learning.

However, the issues of careers education for young people continue to be problematic. Hooley, Watts and Andrews (2015) argue that good quality careers education and employability needs to be curriculum driven and embedded within the school ethos. They suggest that there is a need to build the capacity and professional status for teachers in school. This offers a challenge to the CDI to be the organisation to drive and support this agenda. To address this the CDI works with its Community of Interest for career education to provide bespoke training, conferences and publications for career educators. In July 2014 the CDI published, 'Careers Guidance in Schools and

Colleges: a guide to best practice and commissioning careers guidance services' (CDI, 2014c) in order to support colleagues in schools and colleges in the commissioning of external career development services. It also published 'Why does Employment Engagement Matter?' (CDI, 2014d) which provided support in managing employer activities in schools and colleges. The development of quality careers education and employability in schools is central to ensuring that all young people are supported to develop the skills and knowledge and the ability to apply them effectively to support their own progression. At the heart of this is the need to have a highly effective workforce, working in partnership and supported by a professional body committed to ensuring that all members, regardless of where they work and the role they undertake, will have the tools they need to be the professional practitioners they desire to be.

Conclusion

The Careers Profession Task Force report entrusted the profession with much of the responsibility for change; to shape its own destiny and to forge a stronger profession. These were not inconsiderable challenges and the CDI has been focused since its inception in addressing these. However, not all of the recommendations were in the sector's gift to achieve. One of the report's recommendations was for government commissioned reports on progress towards achievements of the recommendations. Given the lack of value placed on career services by the Coalition Government it was not surprising that no such progress reports were commissioned. However as this article shows much has been achieved in the attempt to create a cohesive sector and enhance the professionalism of those working in it. Whatever the political landscape looks like across the UK, following the new Government in 2015, more challenges will be inevitable. However the profession is now more unified and in a stronger position to face whatever lies ahead.

In the Foreword to the Careers Profession Task Force 2010 report, the Chair, Dame Ruth Silver said,

Professionalism underpins quality and our recommendations are designed to uphold common professional standards and ethics that will raise the standards and integrity of career guidance in this country. And we are convinced that this new era of

enhanced professional practice in career guidance will endure, regardless of any changes made to the way careers services are structured.

Prescient words indeed.

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