

Making a contribution to knowledge in career guidance and counselling, career learning and development

Welcome to the autumn edition of the NICEC journal. For this issue we are focusing on the research of students working on Masters' dissertations or Doctoral theses. Contributors, from a number of countries, are researching and working in the areas of career guidance and counselling or career learning and development. All the articles featured in this issue are from completed or well developed studies. Our authors are to be congratulated for the quality of their research projects and their commitment to continuous professional development, alongside the contribution to knowledge in our sector.

The study of our first author, **Nathan Iverson** from the USA, takes a macro perspective. He states 'the need for dynamic, globally-equipped, adaptive employees has become increasingly necessary to the success of organisations'. To enhance employees' career management skills, a better understanding is required of what is needed to 'navigate' the current and future challenges for career development. Nathan's study compared 2870 individuals across 40 nations to identify the Career Adaptive Practices (CAPs) they used and their relationship to career satisfaction. The study suggests that: 'The predictions for career satisfaction varied by global region indicating that the importance of the practices vary by culture'. The article also outlines practical applications from the study and makes suggestions for future research.

The second article from **Erik Hagaseth Haug** is a study of quality assurance in career guidance in Norwegian schools. Erik's project suggests that there is an assumption of a power struggle between different interests on how quality ought to be understood and then assured. He states: 'Further, the study has an assumption that career guidance is a complex social phenomena and that a systemic approach is needed.' His work aims at building a holistic, rich and nuanced insight of the multitude of understandings about what we mean by quality in career guidance services

within a school context. To do this, Erik employs a critical realist approach to understand such social phenomena and proposes a model to encompass the interrelatedness of the meanings for quality in career guidance in a school context. Arguments are also presented on the potential impact of developing strong quality assurance systems for career guidance.

Our third author is **Liam Harkin** who writes on guidance counsellors' perspectives of the impact of budgetary cutbacks across different school types in the Republic of Ireland. His work found that the impact of budgetary cutbacks on guidance in Irish schools, resulted in funding inequalities between 'second-level school types' that contributed to uneven guidance reductions. These differences were evident, primarily, between fee-charging schools and schools in the Free Education Scheme (FES), leading to unequal distribution of care and a negative student experience. Liam states: 'From its inception in the 1970s, guidance in Irish schools had a holistic, equality agenda' as an 'effective counterweight against many inequalities in schools.' The study suggests managing greater care demands, as a result of decreased counselling services, with less time available, increased guidance counsellors' stress.

Next, **Nalayini Thambar**, writes about the new 'employability climate' within Higher Education (HE) in parts of the UK, which has emerged following the increase in undergraduate tuition fees in 2012. Part of the impact of the new fee regime is a greater attention to graduate outcomes or 'destinations', post university. Nalayini states: 'The resulting focus on careers advisers, questions established practice and their claims to be experts in student career development, yet has potential for greater recognition of the role.' In her article Nalayini argues for such recognition within and beyond universities. Her study explored perspectives on the professional identity of careers advisers by the collection of data via interviewing 21 careers

advisers from 14 universities across England, Wales and Scotland, using a sample reflecting league table data. Her findings suggest that careers advisers in HE are challenged in their professional identity, yet are strongly committed to their role. She concludes by developing recommendations to (re)establish careers advisers as experts in this increasingly visible aspect of the student experience.

In the next article we move from higher education to the experience of young people in an uncertain labour market. **Louise Badelow's** interpretative study explored the narratives of two young people in relation to their engagement with their careers. Louise was interested in how these young people responded to labour market uncertainties and their sense of autonomy or agency with regard to their future career expectations. Louise tells us: 'Whilst the study did not set out to validate any specified theoretical principle, it became evident that both established career theory and post-modern thinking, especially in relation to the role of adversity in building resilience, had shaped these stories'. Her tentative findings suggest that career resilience, alongside other factors affecting career management skills, may have its origins in early experiences and relationships. The conclusion appears to validate the assertion, often questioned, that effective programmes of career learning and development can help to equip young people with the skills they need to negotiate a rapidly changing labour market.

Annemarie Oomen, in the next piece, adopts a European lens for her study which explores parental involvement in career education and guidance in secondary education. Her study draws together the research findings on the importance of parents in career decision making and career building. Annemarie explains that: 'An European political focus on involving parents in education seeks to reduce the dropout rate, in order to improve the efficiency of the educational system'. Since the 1960s research has indicated that parents and families are often the primary influencers in terms of career decisions, leading to work that seeks to involve parents more. Annemarie describes three ways of categorising these interventions as: **(a)** career information-centred; **(b)** family learning; and **(c)** family therapy, and advocates the need for enhanced models for parental engagement in career guidance.

In the penultimate article, **Catherine Reynolds** writes from a focus of careers work in higher education. She describes how career learning and narratology can be blended to create a new approach to career education which she terms 'career criticism'. To show how this can be taught, she draws on the approach to literary criticism as taught within literary studies. Catherine explains that: 'Careers can be seen as stories, conscious and unconscious texts; analysing elements such as structure, plot, narrators, and narrative techniques enables students to interpret surface and below-surface meanings of career stories'. The outcomes are potential tools to assess career texts during formal and informal career learning and development. A range of examples is provided. The approach, which could be applied to other sectors outside HE, can help clients to understand and take action in relation to the multiple influences that have an impact on career development.

Finally, **Anne Delauzun**, also writing from an HE perspective, suggests that many students are becoming more involved in their own careers and employability support via organising workshops, employer talks and networking events. She wonders if it may be time for careers professionals to take a step back and leave them to it. The existing careers literature, she states, focuses on occupational choice and the job search process, whereas careers practitioners generally acknowledge a much broader definition of career behaviour. The article explores evidence a range of contexts, including relevant literature and practitioner experience, of peer influence on HE students' career behaviour. Anne states that, 'there is much to suggest peer influence could be better harnessed as a means of increasing and deepening opportunities for students' career learning'. The article also considers the implications for the design and delivery of HE careers and employability support.

This edition of the NICEC journal has 'showcased' eight contributions to knowledge derived from post-graduate research. Articles from new researchers are always welcome and provide evidence of the talent, commitment and capacity of colleagues working in diverse contexts who are producing insightful work to inform and inspire practice.

Hazel Reid, Editor
