Overview and introduction

Welcome to the April 2020 edition of the NICEC journal. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to be guest editors.

In planning our call for this edition, we aimed to prioritise certain broad themes. We were interested in research that addresses issues about decent work and uncertain labour markets. We also asked for articles that use theory and research to inform career development policy and practice.

The eight articles published in this edition span a range of topics, all of which align to our themes in various ways. Unsurprisingly perhaps, due to who we are as editors (we all work in universities with backgrounds as careers practitioners), many of the articles relate to career development policy and practice in higher education.

Decent work has been present in the international arena for two decades primarily driven by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Social justice, full employment and decent work now figure expressly in the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, it is a concept that has largely been absent from career development policy, practice or scholarship. Decent work has represented an ambitious international agenda, but one which raises questions for many people. Blustein (2019) in the book reviewed in this journal highlights some of the shortcomings of the decent work policy agenda, specifically around its lack of emphasis on work that has meaning and purpose. Hooley (2019) has also warned that however attractive decent work may seem, it is wise for career development specialists to be wary of aligning themselves too closely to specific public policy instruments.

In 2019, a major new ILO report was published that made specific recommendations about decent work. Much of what proponents of decent work argue for aligns with career development priorities, e.g., a universal entitlement to lifelong learning, and supporting people through future of work transitions. Wider issues of social/public policy that are key to decent work have tended to be a lower priority for careers practitioners, although the recent re-direction towards social justice in career guidance, makes the case that practitioners should re-orient their attention to structural issues and be agents of change.

In this edition **Robertson et al.** explicitly address the role of trade unions as key advocates of work, being pivotal in creating social dialogue and giving voice to workers, an important component of decent work. He and his co-authors explore case studies of how careers workers and trade unions can work together fruitfully.

Articles from **Buzdugan** and **Delauzun** address the dilemmas faced by practitioners in supporting more ethical and critical approaches to career development pedagogy and advice and guidance. Effectively, they challenge readers to consider how we support clients and others to engage critically with features of work that may not be decent!

We also asked for articles that address uncertain labour markets and unstable public policy contexts. There have been rapid changes across the globe in the world of work with far-reaching impacts, even for the students and graduates of UK universities who are the focus of attention for many of our authors. We are experiencing the advance of technology in changing work, as well as growing inequalities in labour markets and society, and fears of the halting of intergenerational mobility, not to mention continued economic and political uncertainty.

A number of articles address issues of uncertainty. Reid's, and Scurry et al.'s articles are sociologically oriented. They address inequalities and what these mean for careers practitioners. **Reid** reports on her work with the elite occupation of medicine, S**curry et al.** write about their research with practitioners in understanding the role of graduate resilience. **Pasha** addresses uncertainty but draws from organisational studies literature, interestingly presenting the concept of career dynamism that she developed in her recent doctoral studies.

Finally, our call was open to authors who weave theory and research into practice. **Dacre Pool** provides a

reflective update upon the CareerEDGE model of employability in higher education that will be welcome to those familiar with or new to the model. This has been an influential model in the graduate employability literature, and draws upon a different theoretical tradition to that of career development, although addressing similar topics. **Boyd and Boyd's** article introduces us to findings from recent doctoral work into careers fairs, creating new insights into a feature of career development practice that has endured for decades.

In conclusion, we offer you a 'smorgasbord' of articles that we hope will make you stop and think and inform your future practice. As editors, we resist being jaded about the way things are and believe that openness to dialogue, rigorous research and diverse viewpoints can make a real impact on our own practice and prompt us all to re-connect with our values and purpose. We hope that we fulfil this commitment in our selection of articles.

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Covid-19, career guidance and the importance of decent work

The Covid-19 pandemic emerged at the same time as we prepared for final publication of this edition of the journal. Our themes of decent work and uncertainty have been amplified by the crisis to an extent we could never have imagined possible. The extraordinary nature of this global pandemic compelled us to want to include some thoughts about Covid-19, career guidance and decent work. We write here about it from our English context, but expect our comments may be relevant to readers in other nations.

It is too early to know for sure how Covid-19 will affect work and careers. We must recognise the gravity of what the current situation means for working lives, but also resist doom-mongering that risks creating its own self-fulfilling prophecy. Commentators from within and outside our field have already begun to debate causes of and responses to the spreading of the virus. The UN's environment chief, Inger Andersen (Carrington, 2020) points to environmental degradation as being a direct cause of its emergence. Hooley, Sultana and Thomsen (2020) argue that many capitalist societies

with their focus on economics and market principles are ill-prepared for a health emergency which needs strong social safety nets to protect workers and citizens.

In the UK, we have witnessed some heartening responses to the virus that relate to work. Suddenly it became important to determine the definition of a 'key worker', which has made us all reflect upon the importance of many workers we usually take for granted. For example, low-waged supermarket staff and delivery drivers have been recognised as having an essential status alongside nurses and doctors. However, more negatively, the political legacy of the BREXIT policy means there are shortages of 'key workers', e.g., social carers and agricultural workers.

The profound connection between each of us and our local communities, our nation and the rest of the world is impossible to ignore. The virus rides on the coat tails of globalisation and has been carried across the world with international travellers. Margaret Thatcher's claim that there is 'no such thing as society' has been exposed

as absurd. The virus demands a collective and societal response. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to the collision of our lives as workers, as citizens and as family members (or equivalent). We have experienced this as editors; while working to finalise this journal, we have separately been dealing with home-schooling children, caring for very vulnerable relatives, and managing our own anxieties. We all hold multiple identities and it seems ridiculous to ignore how these are interconnected. More generally, this exposes the fault lines in assumptions about people as rational career actors. The current crisis has highlighted the impossibility of seeing work as anything other than profoundly connected to our lives as a whole.

Uncertainty will be a very real feature of working lives for many people because of the virus. Some will lose their jobs; some businesses even with government support may never re-open. The incomes of particular groups, e.g. self-employed workers appear particularly at risk. A concern for us as editors working in higher education is the challenge the post-virus world will represent for those who are just starting out in their careers. Many of those in more secure work will have work rapidly transformed, as practices such as travelling long distances for face-to-face meetings will be questioned, as workers get more accustomed to technology.

The principles of decent work can help society re-build and recover from this crisis. Those principles are: creating productive and freely chosen work; protecting rights at work; ensuring social protection for workers; and enabling social dialogue between workers and employers. Such ideas can help us move forwards in a world that will never be the same after this crisis. Career guidance can play an important part in supporting these principles.

Career practitioners will be crucial in helping individuals to navigate the uncertainty that will follow the Covid-19 crisis. The establishment of a universal right for all citizens to access careers advice and guidance would help workers in managing careers that have been derailed and disrupted. This advice can include everything from the practicalities of self-employment, to coping with redundancy, as well as making career decisions and all aspects of career management. The recent turn to careers guidance for social justice is timely in arguing that career practitioners should be agents of change in pointing out unfairness and advocating for the most vulnerable. It is not enough for us to default to a focus on helping people to compete with each other for a few sought after jobs. We should be arguing for there to be

decent and meaningful work for all, not just the lucky few who may have the resources to surf the Covid-19 tidal wave.

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