

## Careers Education and Guidance Must Become Much More Sophisticated

Anthony Barnes, Editor

**In June this year, David Hargreaves, Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, spoke to headteachers in Buckinghamshire about the 14-19 reforms. In response to a question about work-related learning, he answered that 'careers education and guidance needs to become much more sophisticated in the curriculum'. Not much more important, but much more sophisticated. In their different ways, all of the contributors to this issue of the journal are arguing the same case.**

Careers practitioners, for example, need to become much more sophisticated in the way that they market and promote their services to the intended beneficiaries of those services: young people themselves, their parents and employers. Sue Maguire discusses employers' lack of awareness of the traditional placement role of careers services in Leicester and Sunderland. This problem may actually be more widespread. The erosion of this placement function may be linked to wider government policies to boost participation in education beyond age 16; but it also suggests that the new Connexions partnerships in England may need to launch a major publicity campaign to make employers more aware of how Connexions can help them with their recruitment and selection of young people.

Susan Askew points out that there is a lack of information about what works in challenging gender inequalities in all aspects of young people's lives and in meeting the specific needs of young women and young men. She argues that effective careers education depends upon having an understanding of the different worlds inhabited by young people and the impact of family, religion, culture and community. The acid test of careers education and guidance is 'Does it make a difference to young people's lives?' Careers education and guidance needs to become much more sophisticated in its support for equality of opportunity and respect for diversity.

In *Portraits of Black Achievement: composing successful careers*, Jacqui MacDonald argues not only for more progressive curriculum reforms but also for more comprehensive careers education and guidance programmes for young people.

Terry Dray continues this theme of strengthening careers programmes for young people in his article about initiatives in higher education to improve employment opportunities for black and Asian graduates.

Jane Hemsley-Brown and Nick Foskett expose the limitations of the simplistic model of rational decision-making which still dominates school careers programmes. This model seriously underestimates the influence of class, gender, ethnicity and lifestyle on young people's career choices. Teachers need to be much more aware of the impact of the ethos and value system of the school, of their knowledge (and lack of knowledge) and of institutional pressures on the choice process. The four C's model of choice and decision-making provides real insights into how young people make and justify their career choices and points to the enhanced role which more sophisticated careers education and guidance strategies could have in improving young people's choices and decisions.

The naïve linkage of school subjects to careers can also lead to poor decision-making. Ken Adey and Mary Biddulph write about the need for history and geography teachers to make a more convincing case about the career relevance of studying these subjects post-14. Surely, this is another area where careers teachers could make a more sophisticated contribution?

Michael Arthur, who is interviewed in this issue of the journal, argues that people need to think of themselves as resources in a larger sense, to the occupations, industries, and economies in which their careers are invested rather than as resources to a single organisation. There is a striking parallel to be made here with careers practitioners. How many just identify themselves with the organisation in which they are working rather than with their 'professional field'. Arguably, it is this weakly-developed sense of professional identity which is one of the factors holding back improvement in careers education and guidance at secondary level.

Finally, Bill Law in 'Points of Departure' criticises the 'one version suits all' model of careers education and guidance - the equivalent of the global cheeseburger. In arguing for local solutions to local problems, Bill too is making the case that careers work needs to become much more sophisticated.