

**Think Tank Issue**

**Anthony Barnes, Editor**

In October 1998, NICEC sponsored an invitational policy consultation on developing a research culture in career education and guidance. Its aim was to identify ways in which a stronger research culture might be developed and supported in all sectors of career education and guidance. The outcomes of this event were published in a NICEC Briefing entitled *Developing a Research Culture in Career Education and Guidance*. One of its key recommendations was the establishment of a research and learning culture that valued receptivity to new ideas, systematic reflection on practice, a spirit of enquiry, and an appreciation for research. It also proposed a biennial conference on research and practice in career education and guidance.

The inaugural issue of the NICEC Journal in October 2000 carried articles by speakers at the first 'Cutting Edge' Conference held at the University of Leicester in April that year.

This issue of the journal carries articles by members of the NICEC network designed to contribute to the debates and discussions at the second 'Cutting Edge' conference due to be held in Coventry at the end of April 2003.

The goals for 'Cutting Edge I' were to encourage practitioners to conduct research and to pay more attention to relevant research; and to encourage professional researchers to communicate their findings to practitioners and to address implications for practice. Overall, this conference was influential in stimulating debate about guidance-related issues and in generating research activity. 'Cutting Edge II' will take that process forward. The conference is structured around three key themes:

**Comparison** - including approaches to guidance from a variety of international, national and sectoral perspectives.

**Change** - including changes in the role of career guidance practitioners and trends and developments in the context in which guidance is provided.

**Learning from research** - including the relationship between research and policy, the role of practitioners in research and the sharing of findings from practice.

This 'think-tank' issue of the journal includes thought-provoking contributions from across a number of different sectors. Phil Hodgkinson and Martin Bloomer complete their exploration of how an understanding of 'cultural capital', 'habitus' and 'horizons for action' can help us to re-think the way we approach career guidance for young people. Val Butcher and Rob Ward investigate the key issues arising from current developments in career guidance for those in higher education. Geoff Ford and Patrick Grattan set out their thinking on the agenda for Third Age guidance.

Wendy Hirsh offers a perspective on the challenges of promoting career development for employees in organisational settings.

Other articles raise important questions about how our field stimulates debate about effective practice and engages with wider constituencies, particularly policy-makers, to win their hearts and minds and to keep alive the torch of the field's collective memory. The research output is an essential element of this collective memory. In two articles, Ruth Hawthorn discusses how to conduct an effective literature review and explains the current state of play in setting up a national infrastructure to support and promote career guidance research. Finally, Bill Law in his Points of Departure column argues the case for a think-tank approach to spearheading improvement in the career guidance field.