

Career Development of Careers Co-ordinators

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An enquiry into how school co-ordinators move into the role, their experience of the role and their subsequent career progression.

In 2002 the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) undertook an enquiry into the career experiences and career development of careers co-ordinators in schools. We were interested in finding out:

- what motivates teachers to become co-ordinators of careers work in schools;
- how careers co-ordinators are recruited and selected;
- about careers co-ordinators' experiences of the role;
- about the subsequent career moves of careers co-ordinators.

In particular we wanted to see what lessons could be learned so that schools might have the right people, doing the right job, to make sure that pupils and students could be provided with programmes of careers education and guidance (careers work) that were of the highest quality, and well led and managed. While the enquiry yielded some interesting responses regarding the career progression of careers co-ordinators, it also raised some significant issues about the nature of the role of careers co-ordinator in schools and how it is perceived by different parties. We plan to take forward further work on these latter issues through publishing a discussion paper following on from this report.

We hope that the outcomes of this project will be of interest to:

- current and future leaders and managers of careers work in schools, concerned with planning and developing effective programmes;
- school senior managers, concerned with appointing careers co-ordinators;
- advisers and providers of professional development, concerned with supporting careers co-ordinators;
- policy makers, in Government and government agencies, concerned with the future development of careers work in schools.

The project was sponsored by the Careers Management group and supported by the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers (NACGT). We are grateful to both organisations. We are particularly grateful to the 200 people who took the time to complete and return our questionnaires.

Introduction

Background and Context

Current Government policy for education and training is being driven by two main themes: inclusion and achievement. The recent policy statement on transforming 14-19 learning (DfES, 2003a), for example, aims to ensure that all young people have access to opportunities that enable them to fulfil their potential. It is recognised that for the reforms to work in practice young people will need effective careers education, linked to impartial advice and guidance. The recently published national framework for careers education and guidance (DfES, 2003b) asserts that careers education also has a vital role in helping young people make best use of the information, advice and guidance provided through Connexions. Indeed, the purpose of the framework is to improve the quality of careers education and guidance (careers work) for young people.

A key factor in school effectiveness is the quality of leadership from the headteacher. It could be argued, therefore, that the effectiveness of the careers work programme will be determined to a significant extent by the quality of leadership and management from the school's careers co-ordinator. If schools are to provide effective careers work it will be important that people with the necessary skills and qualities are appointed to the role of careers co-ordinator.

Previous enquiries undertaken by NICEC have highlighted the importance of the careers co-ordinator taking on more responsibility to lead and manage careers work in the school (Andrews et al., 1997), and of appropriate and relevant professional development being made available to those involved in leading and managing careers work in schools (Law, 2002).

The ad hoc way in which teachers become involved in careers work has been studied by Suzy Harris (1992). Surveys have found that few careers co-ordinators are appointed through a formal procedure (NACGT, 1999) and, crucially, there is very little information on whether careers co-ordinators see themselves as leaders and managers of a curriculum area, or about the extent to which headteachers and other senior managers view them as subject leaders. Little is known about the professional development made available to careers co-ordinators once they are in post, although surveys indicate that only a minority hold a professional qualification in careers work (OFSTED, 1998). Very little is known about the motivations of careers co-ordinators and or their career progression from the role.

The enquiry reported here set out to find out the answers to some of these unknowns, with the intention of increasing our understanding and informing future action.

Key questions

The enquiry sought to find out more about former and current careers co-ordinators in schools, including their motivations and expectations, and to add to our knowledge and understanding about how they are recruited, selected and subsequently supported in their role. It also enquired into careers co-ordinators' experiences of the role itself, including their feelings about the work and their views on any changes in the role, and into their aspirations and career moves after moving on from the role. The scope of the enquiry was extended to cover the views of headteachers and other senior managers in schools about the recruitment and selection of careers co-ordinators, and about the role itself and potential career progression routes. It also collected the views of other teachers, with no experience of managing careers work, about the role of careers co-ordinator.

Intentions

The purpose of the enquiry was to research current practice in order to inform future developments in both practice and policy. We already know that key factors in providing effective careers work are having in post careers co-ordinators who are prepared to take a proactive approach to leading and managing such work in schools (NFER, 2000), and having available relevant professional development opportunities. Our intention in enquiring into the career experiences and career development of careers co-ordinators was to support the future development of careers work in schools by recommending practical actions for those who manage and support careers co-ordinators, to ensure that teachers who become careers co-ordinators are appropriately recruited and supported, motivated to undertake the role effectively and enabled themselves to have fulfilling careers.

Methodology

The enquiry was undertaken in the academic year 2001-2002, by David Andrews and Anthony Barnes, NICEC Fellows, with consultancy support from Bill Law, NICEC Senior Fellow. It was funded by Careers Management and supported by the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers (NACGT).

Data was collected through four questionnaires: one for current careers co-ordinators (38 questions); one for former careers co-ordinators (40 questions); one for headteachers, deputy heads and assistant heads (16 questions) and one for teachers with no experience of having been a careers co-ordinator (13 questions). Each questionnaire consisted of a combination of multi-response and open questions. Using current membership data kindly provided by the NACGT copies of the questionnaire for current careers co-ordinators were sent to a sample of school across England, with copies

of the questionnaires for senior managers and for other teachers also enclosed. Using historic membership data copies of the questionnaire for former careers co-ordinators were sent to a sample of former members of the Association, again from throughout England. The approach taken was an attempt to sample as full a range of views as possible but not to try to gather a representative sample of responses. The report, therefore, consists of a qualitative enquiry rather than a quantitative survey.

A total of 198 completed questionnaires were returned.

Current careers co-ordinators	44
Former careers co-ordinators	50
Headteachers and senior managers	52
Other teachers	52

The project team then analysed the data and the outcomes are reported here. We are grateful to Matthew Barnes for inputting the data and undertaking the initial analyses.

Findings

About careers co-ordinators

Profile

Although the size and composition of each of the samples do not permit detailed quantitative statements some general features can be discerned from the data.

Careers co-ordinators tend to be experienced teachers, and aged over 40. It is unusual to find a co-ordinator with fewer than 10 years experience in teaching prior to taking on the role. Women outnumber men on a ratio of approximately 2 to 1, which may simply reflect the overall gender balance among secondary school teachers. The most common allocation of responsibility points is one or two. The most common job title is 'careers co-ordinator', although formerly a large proportion were called 'head of careers'.

No teacher trains initially as a careers teacher and the survey data shows no clear pattern of subject areas from which careers teachers are drawn. Current careers co-ordinators come from a full range of teaching subjects, dispelling the myth that careers teachers are former PE teachers who want to stay inside in the winter! If there is a discernible pattern among former careers co-ordinators it is that they include a higher than average number of teachers of geography, which would make some sense given the common area of interest in the local economy and labour market.

Professional qualifications in CEG

Of those who responded to the survey just over half held a professional qualification in careers work. This figure is higher than the equivalent finding in earlier surveys, with significantly larger samples. Among current careers co-ordinators the specific qualification is almost exclusively at Certificate level, while the former careers co-ordinators hold either a Diploma or a Certificate. It is possible that

this trend reflects the changes in provision of accredited courses in careers education and guidance, although this in itself might reflect a change in the commitment of schools to release teachers for training or the capacity of busy teachers to take on longer courses.

About becoming a careers co-ordinator

Initial attraction

Most postholders, both former and current, only thought about becoming a careers co-ordinator once they were teaching in a school and/or when the position became vacant. Hardly any teachers thought about such a career option either before or during initial teacher training.

For the majority of careers co-ordinators the original attraction was:

- working with individual young people;
- supporting pupils' progression into further learning or into work;
- raising aspirations and contributing to pupils' achievement.

"I enjoy dealing directly with pupils' development, whatever their ability, and assisting their progression"

For many former careers co-ordinators the nature of the work itself was also an attraction. Respondents identified features such as:

- the greater degree of autonomy;
- the greater variety of work;
- the opportunities for contact with the wider community;
- the opportunities for professional development.

"I enjoyed making contact with local businesses"

For current careers co-ordinators the nature of the work and the opportunities for professional development were less of an attraction. They identified:

- the opportunity to benefit young people;
- promotion.

"Making a real impact on the aspirations of pupils for life after school"

When teachers who had no experience of being a careers co-ordinator were asked if they had ever considered becoming one, a large majority said 'no', and when asked if they would consider becoming a careers co-ordinator in the future, most of them still said 'no'.

Although they are interested in working with young people, and the opportunities for professional development and promotion, the overriding factor in their decision making is their lack of interest in the nature of the work. What was identified as a strong motivator by former careers co-ordinators is stated as a negative factor by current teachers who have no experience of the role. The two groups are, however, not talking about the same things. When former

careers co-ordinators talk about being attracted by the work they refer to the increased autonomy and to networking with employers, training providers etc. When current teachers talk about being put off by the work they refer to the time it takes to organise activities and to the lack of support from tutors.

"Lots of staff think it's a bit of a thankless task. I imagine many staff don't realise what is involved."

(Teacher of modern foreign languages in an 11-16 school)

It could be, therefore, that the finding relates more to individuals in the role and those not in the role having different views about what the job involves. This interpretation is supported by the evidence that among the (minority of) current teachers who claim to know more than a little about the role of co-ordinating careers there is a higher proportion who would consider taking it on.

Recruitment, selection and appointment

Most careers co-ordinators are appointed internally: only a small minority are recruited externally from another school, and there has been no change to this pattern from past to present practice.

Candidates find out about the vacancy through internal adverts or direct approaches from headteachers. Approximately half the posts are filled by simply being asked to take on the role: only half of those who responded, both former and current careers co-ordinators, were required to submit written applications and attend formal interviews. Headteachers, however, say that when recruiting a careers co-ordinator they would advertise the post both internally and externally, and over two-thirds would require written applications and formal interviews.

A large number of careers co-ordinators come from positions as main grade teachers, sometimes with additional management responsibility in their subject area. In the past some would have been existing pastoral managers or heads of subject departments, but this is less likely in current times, probably reflecting the additional burdens today of these middle management posts.

Experiences, skills and qualities

When asked what they brought to the job careers co-ordinators, both past and present, listed:

- experience of careers work, of related areas of the school's work such as pastoral care, and of the world beyond teaching;
- skills such as interpersonal, guidance, communication, networking, organising, administration and management;
- qualities such as interest in the work and in young people, enthusiasm, commitment, patience, tolerance and flexibility.

When asked what they are looking for in a careers co-ordinator, headteachers identified similar lists of

experiences, skills and qualities but added to them: vision, self-motivation and innovation.

Motivation and expectations

The enquiry was interested in finding out about the career development of careers co-ordinators. A starting point was to find out what individuals wanted to get out of the job when they started. Both former and current co-ordinators list the satisfaction of helping individual young people as the principal motivation, followed by a broadening of their own experience and professional development, opportunities to link with the wider community and to develop careers work, and, lastly, promotion and increased pay.

"Doing something that mattered to pupils."
(Former careers co-ordinator in an 11-18 school)

In relation to future career intentions for themselves, most had not thought about it or had nothing specific in mind. Where they did have some intention it was to move into a more senior management role, but this was only a minority of careers co-ordinators. Compared with those who wanted to remain in the role, the careers co-ordinators who wanted to move on tended to be younger, with fewer years experience and with fewer management points. They were more likely to state promotion as an attraction for moving into the role and took more opportunities to participate in professional development. They were also more likely to see part of their role as linking careers work to wider aspects of the school's work and to view their time as a careers co-ordinator as helping their future career development.

Headteachers viewed the principal career progression opportunities for careers co-ordinators to be senior management roles, pastoral middle management roles or advisory work. Almost all of the headteacher respondents said that, in their view, the experience gained through being a careers co-ordinator would prepare individuals for senior management positions.

"It is a whole-school role which prepares well for senior management."
(Headteacher)

Training and professional development

Most careers co-ordinators have experienced several days training for the role, either prior to moving into the role or during their first two years in post. This is true for both former and current co-ordinators, although the proportion who had had no training was higher in the past, reflecting the increased access to professional development in recent years.

About being a careers co-ordinator

The role

Careers co-ordinators, past and present, and headteachers, all view the role of careers co-ordinator as being about organising and delivering careers work, planning

programmes and supporting teachers, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating careers work, and making strategic links with other aspects of the school's work. Significant trends are that careers co-ordinators in the past tended to place greater emphasis on teaching and less on monitoring and supporting the work of other teachers.

One further point of significance is that headteachers place greater emphasis on expecting careers co-ordinators to contribute to whole school strategic management than careers co-ordinators report doing in practice, although co-ordinators identify the need to do more to raise the profile of careers work and to integrate careers work more into the school's work overall. Another is that other teachers regard the job of careers co-ordinator to be predominantly concerned with organising specific activities, such as work experience and industry days.

Interestingly headteachers are evenly divided between those who think that the role of careers co-ordinator can be taken on by an individual who is not a teacher and those who think that it must be filled by a teacher. When headteachers say the role can be filled by a non-teacher they see the job as largely administrative. Those who take the view that the role should be filled by a teacher say this is because the postholder needs to understand the needs of young people and have an understanding of teaching and learning and of the curriculum.

Work satisfaction

Careers co-ordinators in the past, and careers co-ordinators today, are happy in their work, with both categories being split evenly between those who say they are 'very content' and those who describe themselves as 'reasonably content': only a small minority consider themselves 'discontent'. The main sources of job satisfaction are the positive response from young people and networking with adults beyond the school.

"More and more pupils saying "thank you"."
(Current careers co-ordinator in an 11-16 school)

By far the most significant sources of dissatisfaction are too much administration, insufficient time to do the job and constant changes. Some careers co-ordinators also report a lack of interest from their senior managers.

"I bitterly regret that I was unable to continue with my careers work. The expectations of my school were high and I was keen to deliver. Senior managers were unwilling to accept that time was needed for this and never re-assigned my other responsibilities. However, I will never regret those years when I was able to encourage and guide so many of my pupils."
(Former careers co-ordinator, who retired due to ill-health)

Other teachers acknowledge that they have only a limited knowledge of the role of careers co-ordinator but their impressions of co-ordinators' likes and dislikes about their job concur with what co-ordinators actually feel. Current co-ordinators are evenly split across three categories of

response to the questions about how they feel about the role now compared with when they were appointed: a third are more content, a third feel about the same, and a third are less content. Their responses are influenced primarily by the extent to which they perceive careers work to be valued or not, and their capacity to do the job in the time given.

"I feel respected as an individual but the role of careers co-ordinator is not valued."

(Current careers co-ordinator in an 11-16 school)

Time and other responsibilities

Careers co-ordinators are currently allocated, on average, two hours per week of timetabled time for their role (this compares with an allocation of three hours per week in the past) and spend an average of just over five hours a week managing careers work.

Careers co-ordinators are seen as middle managers in schools. Commonly the role is combined with other management roles, particularly that of co-ordinating work experience and work-related learning. In more recent times the role has also been combined with that of co-ordinating records of achievement/Progress File.

Changes

When asked how the job has changed over time careers co-ordinators report that it has grown considerably. The role is a wider management function, with a greater number of staff involved in delivery.

"More management-style approach, with development plans etc."
(Current careers co-ordinator in a grammar school)

"It has become more formal, with greater emphasis on accountability. This has made the job increasingly paper-based, with a clear need for curriculum planning and evaluation"
(Current careers co-ordinator in a special school)

They also report a growth in work experience, with the job of co-ordinating it now often being split into a separate role from that of careers co-ordinator. More recently they report the extension of careers education to the earlier years of secondary schooling.

When asked how they have changed over their time in post careers co-ordinators report that they have become better at working with others and have improved their skills of organisation, and that they have become more confident, flexible and assertive and more experienced. They have also, however, felt more frustrated, disillusioned and tired.

About moving on from being a careers co-ordinator

Current careers co-ordinators are divided evenly between those who want to carry on doing the work they are doing and those who aspire to moving on, to senior or other middle management roles in education or out of education into guidance related work or self-employment.

When the career moves of former careers co-ordinators are tracked, the two most common routes are retirement and advisory/consultancy work, followed by other pastoral roles such as head of year or head of sixth form, and a return to a main grade teaching position. Progression into a senior management role comes in fifth position. This is despite headteachers identifying it as the most likely career progression opportunity for careers co-ordinators.

There is a general feeling from careers co-ordinators themselves that their experience in the role helps rather than hinders their subsequent career development, mainly by providing a wider perspective on education and the opportunities to gain management skills and experience of working with a range of people and organisations.

"Broadened my understanding of the school curriculum and gave me a real overview of the curriculum-pastoral interface. As a careers coordinator you work very much 'whole school' 11-18... Whole-school perspective provided an unrivalled step to senior management rather than a single department focus."

(Former careers co-ordinator, now an assistant head)

Conclusions

The enquiry set out to investigate the career development of careers co-ordinators and while it has produced some interesting findings in relation to career progression the more significant findings centre around the nature of the role itself and how it is viewed from different perspectives.

Career progression

It would seem that careers co-ordinators are generally experienced teachers who have moved into the role because of their interest in working with young people, are broadly content with their jobs and not always looking to move to other positions. Some observers might regard this as a lack of ambition, while others might argue that careers co-ordinators have settled into roles they find fulfilling.

"Not a job for people going places... No clear progression from careers co-ordinator - a dead end, or plateau."

(Former careers co-ordinator, now retired)

"I'm happy where I am."

(Current careers co-ordinator in an 11-18 school)

We know of several former careers co-ordinators who have moved on to advisory and consultancy roles in careers education and guidance and into positions as headteachers, but the evidence collected through this project suggest that such pathways are not at the forefront of current careers co-ordinators' minds. One development that has occurred since collecting the data for this enquiry has been the availability of Advanced Skills Teacher posts in careers education and it will be interesting to see what impact this might have on those individuals' subsequent career paths.

More formal procedures for appointing careers co-ordinators are being implemented but the evidence suggests that there is still some way to go before the approaches that headteachers claim to support - involving advertising the position, requesting written application and arranging formal interviews - are adopted in practice.

Support for the role

The take-up of professional development opportunities is increasing, with Certificate courses becoming the most common form of qualification. Although more careers co-ordinators now have training for the role, it is still the case that no more than half hold a professional qualification in careers work. It is also the case that there is no Initial Teacher Training route into careers work, although such routes are being developed for citizenship.

The findings go on to demonstrate that co-ordinators are not currently given the time needed to do their job. During the course of the project the Government, and all but one of the teachers' unions, signed a national agreement on tackling workload, which provides a clear opportunity to improve the situation (DfES, 2003c). The agreement requires that, from September 2003, routine administrative tasks are transferred from teachers to support staff, and that teachers with leadership and management responsibilities are allocated time in the school day to support them in fulfilling their duties.

How the role of careers co-ordinator is seen

There are significant differences in emphasis between other teachers, careers co-ordinators themselves and headteachers on how the role of careers co-ordinator is perceived. Although all three groups identify a lot of common tasks, other teachers see careers co-ordinators primarily as *organisers* of specific activities, careers co-ordinators see themselves as *co-ordinators* of programmes and *networkers* within the school and with the wider community, while headteachers see them as *leaders* and *managers* of aspects of the school's work. Trainee teachers in initial training know very little about the role.

It could be argued that these differences can be explained as follows.

- The most visible parts of the careers co-ordinator's work to other teachers are organised activities such as work experience, industry days, mock interview sessions and careers conventions. It is not surprising therefore that this is what other teachers think the job is mainly about.
- Careers co-ordinators themselves obviously recognise the work they do in co-ordinating their programmes of careers work and networking with others to contribute to these programmes. The findings indicate that co-ordinators are beginning to recognise that they also have a wider brief to lead and manage, and that these parts of the role are increasing.

- Headteachers say that they want careers co-ordinators to have a vision and to be innovative, and they identify contributing to strategic management as an important part of the role. This is not, however, always communicated clearly to careers co-ordinators as several report a perceived lack of support from their senior managers. Headteachers themselves are not always clear about whether the role is one of strategic leadership and management as half think that it can be filled by a non-teacher since it is largely administrative. Nevertheless, the role is more likely these days to be combined with related roles such as RoA co-ordinator which suggests that headteachers are recognising some strategic management links. Where headteachers are clear that the role is more than just co-ordination and involves leadership, this is not always seen by their careers co-ordinators.

In practice the role of careers co-ordinator probably encompasses all three sets of perceptions - they are organisers, co-ordinators, networkers, leaders and managers. The different functions do not, however, all have to be allocated to one individual: they could be shared among several individuals and combined with parts of other roles.

We suggest that it would be helpful to identify the range of functions that need to be undertaken and to explore different ways in which those functions could be allocated within schools, so that:

- role specifications could be clear;
- procedures could be established to ensure that people with the required skills and qualities were appointed to the roles;
- appropriate professional development and support could be planned and provided.

There seems to be more consensus around the co-ordinating and networking aspects of the role, but less around the strategic leadership and management functions. Headteachers need to clarify for themselves whether they want careers co-ordinators to be leaders and managers, and then communicate this clearly to careers co-ordinators, via role specifications, appointments procedures and support for professional development.

A useful first step would be to take advantage of the national agreement on tackling workload, to reallocate from the current job description all the administrative and organisational tasks to a careers support assistant, in order to release time to focus on co-ordination, management and leadership. Headteachers and careers co-ordinators could then work together to re-define the role of careers co-ordinator, paying careful attention to the leadership aspects and to making it manageable as a role. There is a range of options for how the co-ordination, management and leadership functions might be allocated within the

management structures of schools, including, possibly, combined with some of them with different roles. Once roles have been agreed they should provide the basis for appointing the best people and for planning appropriate professional development.

Emerging context

Since work started on this project Connexions has been introduced across England, and the Government has set out an agenda for transforming secondary education. Both these developments have an impact on the outcomes of this project.

Many schools are establishing the role of Connexions co-ordinator/manager, to manage, at strategic and operational levels, the various aspects of the school's work that relate to Connexions, e.g. pastoral care, careers education and guidance, PSHE, citizenship, inclusion, etc. This will have a knock-on effect on the role of careers co-ordinator. The policy statement on 14-19 education suggests that schools should develop greater co-ordination between PSHE, citizenship and careers education. This too will have implications for the role of careers co-ordinator and how it relates to the roles of co-ordinating PSHE and citizenship. Further, schools are to be required to provide work-related learning for all pupils in Key Stage 4 and this again will impact on the role of careers co-ordinator.

The suggestions above are that the role of careers co-ordinator might be *re-focused*, on teaching and learning, and on leadership and management, by allocating the administrative tasks to a careers support assistant, managed by the careers co-ordinator, and *re-defined*, to reflect the full range of functions, including strategic leadership and management. These developments would need to take account of the new context and so the role might also be *re-configured* with other, related roles, for example those concerned with the management of Connexions work within the school and of those aspects of the curriculum concerned primarily with young people's personal and social development, including careers education and guidance, PSHE, citizenship, personal finance education and learning about work and enterprise.

Recommendations

- (1) Providers of professional development and policy makers should continue to make available to careers co-ordinators professional development, including accredited qualifications in careers education and guidance, and should explore the possibility of developing an Initial Teacher Training route into careers teaching.
- (2) Headteachers and careers co-ordinators should work together to implement the contractual changes in the National Agreement on Tackling Workload, to release careers co-ordinators to spend more time on leading and managing teaching and learning.

- (3) NICEC should produce a discussion paper, re-specifying the role of careers co-ordinator and exploring options for how the functions might fit within school management structures. The work should draw on the outcomes of this enquiry, together with existing guidance on the careers co-ordinator's role, e.g. *What Do Careers Co-ordinators Do?* (NACGT), *National Standards for Subject Leaders, exemplified for the role of careers co-ordinator* (NACGT), *Occupational Standards for CEG* (DfEE), and on the National College for School Leadership's 'Leading from the Middle' programme of professional development. The paper should present a range of models for how the role might be organised within school management structures and should make recommendations about appropriate professional development to support the role. It should conclude with questions for discussion with the NACGT, the two headteachers' professional associations in England and other interested parties.

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