

John Killeen: A Career

Tony Watts

John Killeen died last Christmas, after a long struggle with cancer. He was 56.

John read Behavioural Science at the University of Aston and then completed an MPhil in Sociology at Birkbeck College, University of London. He had various jobs as a Research Assistant and Lecturer at Aston and at The Hatfield Polytechnic before being appointed Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute of Adult Education in 1977. His main task there was writing an influential report on Paid Educational Leave.

John joined the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) as Senior Fellow (Research) in 1980. It was, in retrospect, an extraordinary opportunity. NICEC had been set up in 1975 as a joint activity of the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) and The Hatfield Polytechnic (now the University of Hertfordshire). The Institute's research programme had been launched by Professor Donald Super, previously of Columbia University in New York, with the aid of a three-year grant from the Leverhulme Trust. The Polytechnic was sufficiently pleased with NICEC's progress to agree to a full-time research appointment, without teaching responsibilities. It took some time for John to establish himself in what was a new field for him, but the quality and significance of his work amply rewarded the Polytechnic's faith. It is difficult to conceive of a similar appointment being made on the same terms today.

John's most important work was on the effects and benefits of career guidance. Following a literature review with Jenny Kidd of the learning outcomes of guidance, he was the senior author of the monograph on *The Economic Value of Careers Guidance* (Policy Studies Institute, 1992) which, along with the accompanying NICEC Briefing, had considerable impact not only nationally but internationally, and continues to do so. He later carried out two important empirical studies of the effects of guidance on both employed and unemployed adults. His fruitful partnership with Michael White of PSI in this work gave it added authority.

John also did some influential work on career theory, including a study with Jenny Kidd of the role of theory in the careers interview. Other studies included the demand for career guidance from adults, the changing relationship between the Careers Service and schools, the process of work entry, and the impact of *The Real Game*; plus a literature review on the relationship between career education and

guidance in schools and pupil motivation and attainment. In addition, he supervised several successful research dissertations.

When in the mid-1990s we decided to produce a book to integrate the work that NICEC had done to that point, John took responsibility for the chapters on the social context of guidance, on career theory, on the learning and economic outcomes of guidance, on the Careers Service (with Jenny Kidd), and on evaluation. The book (*Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance: Theory, Policy and Practice*) was published by Routledge in 1996.

John's substantial contribution to the field of career guidance was distinguished by his rigorous knowledge of research methodology and by the breadth of knowledge across the social sciences from which he was able to draw, embracing sociology, psychology and economics. His knowledge of the research literature within the field was unparalleled within the UK, and across most of the world; his loss leaves a huge gap in this respect.

Within our many discussions in NICEC, John assumed the role of an agnostic sceptic. Surrounded by many committed believers in career guidance, it was a critically important role, from which all of us in NICEC benefited. His contributions were often presented obliquely and with an inimitable sense of humour. As one of my NICEC colleague, Geoff Ford, put it: 'It is virtually impossible to convey the suspended but always silent and respectful expectancy whenever John felt moved to make one of his always amusing and equally always wise and penetrating contributions'.

John is survived by his wife, Mary, and his son, Joe. He is deeply missed by all his colleagues at NICEC and beyond. His body of work provides a strong legacy on which we can continue to build.