

## The Research Agenda

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In the spring of 2005, NICEC analysed and wrote up a consultation exercise carried out by the National Guidance Research Forum's (NGRF) Strategic Group (Hawthorn et al., 2005). The NGRF had cast its net widely, through an electronic questionnaire to practitioners, managers, policy-makers and researchers, and through a series of workshops around the country that included the launch of the NGRF's website in September 2004, a gathering of tutors of the Qualification in Careers Guidance, an IAG partnership meeting and a number of other events for stakeholders at which these two questions were debated:

- How can we improve guidance research in the UK? (This included asking about research gaps, improving research capacity and quality, and how to involve guidance providers in research.)
- How can we use research to improve practice? (This included helping practitioners, managers and policy-makers access and make use of research findings, bring research into training and CPD, and inform the work of providers who do not have a specialist professional training.)

The consultation could not tell us what the actual research gaps were, of course, but they did tell us what people across all sectors of guidance saw as areas they would like to know more about, genuinely setting the agenda for the future not only of primary research but for more (and more accessible) reviews of existing research, and for better ways of disseminating findings to potential users. It also showed that there was a real interest, from these admittedly self-selected groups, to be more involved in research themselves. There were some practitioners and managers who felt able to keep up with the literature and share it with colleagues, and some who were involved in research themselves; but there were also many who admitted that regretfully they were just not able to do this any more, following the increased pressure on them to meet statutory requirements. Further evidence of the erosion of the professional development that could be so helpful to clients, that ironically follows from inappropriate service targets, and of the difficult climate in which all partners are trying to generate a research culture in guidance.

The many topics mentioned by respondents to the NGRF consultation included a wish to know

more about the guidance needs of specific target groups. The current issue of this Journal includes reports by Vivienne Barker and colleagues on the guidance needs of people with mental health problems, by Barrie Irving on the career education needs of Muslim girls, and by Sonali Shah on the career choices of young people with disabilities, all groups in which NGRF respondents expressed a particular interest. Respondents also wanted to know more about the guidance needs of graduate students, and in this issue we are able to publish an update on the research by Helen Bowman and Helen Colley on the guidance needs of MA students; they focus on that particular group, but their findings raise questions about the needs of all studying at postgraduate level.

The first article by Helen Colley in this Journal explores more directly the issues raised by the NGRF report, namely the relationship between research, policy and practice that is central to NICEC's own ongoing mission. This important piece has close links with the paper by Michael White that was delivered in October 2004 as the first John Killeen Lecture, funded by Ufi learndirect. The late John Killeen, Fellow of NICEC, was a keen believer in the importance of methodologically robust research in the evaluation both of policy measures and of guidance practice: the last issue of the Journal was devoted to articles commemorating John and his work. Michael's article in the current issue, together with Helen's, point forward to the next initiative to promote a stronger evidence base for guidance, namely the third Cutting Edge research conference to be held in 2006. Since the second conference in 2003 there have been considerable developments in building research-policy-practice links, such as the creation of the NGRF website, the National Library Resource for Guidance at Derby, and the NGRF Strategic Group itself. The 2006 event, to be planned by NICEC in collaboration with the Strategic Group and the Federation of Professional Associations for Guidance, FEDPAG, will be able to review these developments and offer a showcase for the research of all kinds that has followed from them.

### Reference

- Hawthorn, R., Barham, L., and Maguire, M. (2005) *Setting the Agenda for Career Guidance Research*. Leicester: The Guidance Council. Available on the NICEC website ([www.crac.org.uk/nicec/nicec.htm](http://www.crac.org.uk/nicec/nicec.htm)) and the NGRF website ([www.guidance-research.org](http://www.guidance-research.org)).