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What Can the Higher Education Curriculum do for Careers?

A Selection of Articles from the Conference Organised by the Centre for Career Management Skills in January 2007

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Guidelines for contributors

Contributions are welcomed. Main articles should normally be 1,000-3,000 words in length. They should be submitted to the editor by post or email at the above address. Taped contributions are welcomed.

Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal is published by CRAC (Careers Research and Advisory Centre), an independent educational charity founded in 1964. CRAC aims to promote the importance of and encourage active career development and career-related learning for the benefit of individuals, the economy and society.

Aims and scope

Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal is published for:

- Career practitioners working in schools, colleges, Connexions/IAG services, higher education careers services, adult guidance agencies, companies, community organisations, etc.
- Trainers, lecturers, advisers and consultants working with career practitioners.
- Individuals working towards qualifications in career education, career guidance and career management.
- Government departments and business and community organisations with an interest in the work of career practitioners.

It sets out to:

- Promote evidence-based practice by making theory, policy and the results of research and development more accessible to career practitioners in their day-to-day work.
- Encourage discussion and debate of current issues in career research and development.
- Disseminate good practice.
- Support continuing professional development for career practitioners.
- Help practitioners to develop and manage career education and guidance provision in the organisations in which they work.

Editorial

What Can the Higher Education Curriculum Do for Careers?

Julia Horn and A.G. Watts

The growth of career education programmes within higher education institutions has been one of the major developments in the UK career development field in the last few years. As the survey by Foskett & Johnston (2006) indicates, over two-fifths of higher education institutions now have credit-bearing career education for at least some of their students; of those who do not, just over one in ten have plans to do so. Over half of the provision has been developed in the last five years.

An important paper by Phil McCash in a recent issue of the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* (McCash, 2006) indicates a number of intriguing distinctions between career(s) education in schools and in higher education. In schools, careers education is statutory, with learning outcomes imposed from without, but assessment is informal. In higher education, by contrast, career education – sometimes alternately known as career management skills (Hawkins & Winter, 1995; Hustler *et al.*, 1998) or career development learning (Watts, 2006) – is non-statutory, with learning outcomes developed from within, but assessment is often formal and credit-rated.

An opportunity to review and reflect upon the state of the art in career education within higher education was provided by a conference organised by the Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) at the University of Reading and held over two days in January 2007. CCMS welcomed 173 delegates from 83 higher education institutions, and the programme offered 18 workshops and presentations in addition to keynote speeches from Pauline Kneale, Andrew Whitmore, Tony Watts and Simon Reichwald. The event was an opportunity for CCMS to launch its new career learning website, 'Destinations', but was also an invitation to showcase other approaches to career education and to debate and analyse issues involved in developing the role of careers in the curriculum.

What can the curriculum do for careers? This was the theme of the conference and is also the title for this special edition of the NICEC journal, which presents a small selection of articles from presenters at the conference. The theme proved to be an apt way to examine the proliferation of career education in higher education in the UK, allowing the focus to fall upon the curriculum and questions of what the higher education curriculum is for, as well as upon its relationship to careers, and how careers professionals can best educate and help their clients.

Currently, in most institutions, the take-up of careers modules is fairly small. The only institution which makes such modules compulsory for all students is the University of Reading. A show of hands in one of the sessions at the conference indicated, however, that such an approach, or other strategies to extend the level of participation, are under consideration in a number of institutions.

Several themes arose during the plenary presentations and in the workshops. How can careers professionals gain access to the curriculum and to students in higher education without facing hostility from academics, who are fearful of their curriculum time being squeezed and of 'dumbing down'? What outcomes do we expect from career education? Should we be looking to first destinations (DLHE[1]) figures for proof of effective teaching, or to student feedback, or to assessed work for evidence of learning? In a labour market in which there are more graduates than graduate jobs, to what extent are all our efforts about competition amongst universities to gain our students the best jobs at the expense of other universities? Can career education bridge the divide between governmental policy-making and liberal educational values, or is it another trend that may flourish quietly in some areas of the curriculum, but will never impact upon the vast majority?

Such questions are explored further in this issue, which invites readers to step back from their daily concerns and consider the wider issues involved in the development of career education in the higher education curriculum. Two contributions, from Ros Foskett, and from Jenny Bimrose and Jane Artess, summarise recent research projects commissioned by HECSU: the first to understand respectively the nature and extent of credit-bearing career education in the curriculum; the second to provide a literature review of evidence on the effectiveness of careers interventions. These two articles provide a useful overview of the current status of career education in the UK, as well as identifying research questions that urgently need answering.

[1] Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education

In contrast to the wider picture offered in these two articles, Glen Crust's article examines the impact and effectiveness of career education at a single institution. His in-depth analysis of different outcome measures and student responses to career education courses probes the issues inherent in career education in enlightening ways. In particular, his analogy of reluctant students on careers modules, as being like alcoholics who are not ready to give up their habit, is an important insight into the particular challenge of providing career education to those who have not voluntarily signed up for it.

Some of the suggestions which arise in Crust's article are echoed in two 'think pieces', by Phil McCash and Julia Horn respectively. All three articles advocate, via different approaches, a conception of career education which gives students the opportunity to research and define their own understanding of terms such as 'career', 'employability' and 'graduateness'. This approach can be defined by using McCash's designation, 'Career Studies', in which the student conceived as researcher and critical thinker gains precedence over the student conceived as the object of the demands of graduate employers.

Research skills are also given prominence in Pauline Kneale's article, which calls on careers education to really stretch students through assignments. In other ways, however, Kneale's approach can be contrasted with McCash's conception of Career Studies. Kneale focuses on how careers advisers and academics can work together to ensure regular contact with careers education and employability activities throughout a degree programme. She proposes embedding student contact with careers primarily through academic work and assessment, and argues that an 'information flow' between senior managers, academics and careers professionals is vital to create interest and engagement.

We might ask, as Foskett does in her review of career education, who is best placed to engender this engagement, and who is qualified and willing to create and teach courses of 'Career Studies' or indeed any form of career education? Should this be the role of academics, of careers advisers, of a new breed of teaching-focused (and perhaps research-focused) careers professionals, or of creative partnerships between careers and academic staff? The attendance at the CCMS conference of participants in all of these categories suggest that institutions are finding many different answers to this question, and offering many different varieties of career education. We hope that, whatever their own role and perspective, readers will find ideas within this special edition to challenge their thinking and invigorate their practice.

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CCMS

The Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) is a HEFCE-funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). The Centre was established in 2005 to build on the University of Reading's previous success in establishing a programme of Career Management Skills in the curriculum for all undergraduate students. One of the principal achievements of the Centre to date has been the creation of a flexible online learning resource to support the delivery of careers education programmes. This website, 'Destinations', can be tailored to suit the needs of different higher education institutions and customised through a virtual learning environment (VLE).

The Centre also awards fellowships to fund innovative careers education projects both at the University of Reading and at other institutions. The fellowships are only a part of the Centre's outreach and dissemination work, which also includes an annual conference and two careers education working groups focused on the needs of foundation degree and postgraduate degree students. The Centre also supports two doctoral students who are examining how higher education, careers interventions and work-related experiences impact upon students and their career choices. More information about these studentships and the work of CCMS can be found at the project website: http://www.reading.ac.uk/ccms

Would You Credit It? Issues in Understanding Patterns of Credit-bearing Careers Education in the Higher Education Curriculum

Rosalind Foskett

The relationship between the labour market, employers and the higher education (HE) curriculum is a key area for debate. This article considers some of the issues concerning credit-bearing careers education in universities and colleges. A number of elements in the HE landscape have converged regarding the nature of the curriculum offered to students. Increased fees have made the cost of gaining a degree much higher overall, even if the up-front costs have been reduced. The move to a mass market for HE with participation rates approaching 50% of those of those under 30 years of age has changed the proportion entering the workforce with a first degree, although evidence quoted by the government on the value of a degree on lifetime earnings (Blair, 2004) in this new mass market has yet to be tested. Employability of graduates is becoming a key question for students and their families and part of their decision-making during recruitment. What students learn during their time at university is important for politicians and employers too, and political initiatives in recent years have sought to increase the integration of employability skills and enterprise initiatives in programmes (e.g. Higher Education for Capability (1988), Enterprise in Higher Education (1989), the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) and, more recently, the publication of the Leitch Review of Skills (2006)).

Increasingly, higher education institutions (HEIs) are being encouraged to review their curriculum in terms of the employability of graduates (Yorke, 2004) and the nature of their careers services, and to involve employers more in developing demand-led (often used synonymously with 'employer-focused') curriculum. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) code of practice places a responsibility on HEIs to provide integrated careers provision and to ensure that staff are kept informed of current employment trends:

> **If CEIG [Careers Education, Information and Guidance], as well as the employability aspects of course content and of curriculum-based skills development, are to be relevant and up-to-date, then they must be informed by accurate labour market information and by the experience and perspective of employers. This is especially important in the context of a rapidly changing employment market. Systems and procedures should therefore be in place to ensure that these feedback loops operate effectively both at the level of CEIG provision, including staff development and training, and of curriculum design and programme specification.**
>
> **(QAA, 2001, para 16)**

In 2005/6, a national research project, commissioned and funded by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU), investigated the nature and extent of credit-bearing careers education provision in HE (Foskett and Johnston, 2006). This article considers some of the methodological issues which faced the project team and poses some questions to careers professionals about the nature of credit-bearing provision.

Aims and methodology

The project aimed to map the provision of credit-bearing careers education within UK HEIs and further and higher education (FHE) colleges and to produce a fine-grained typology for this provision. In order to do this, data was collected using a nationwide survey, and a number of vignettes of interesting and innovative practice were produced. The research data was collected in three stages. Firstly, key informant interviews were conducted to help scope the project and provide advice about the survey. Individuals were selected as a purposive sample well placed to be able to speak authoritatively on the nature of current provision and with extensive experience of careers education in higher education. The sample included individuals spanning all sectors (universities established before or after the removal of the binary divide between universities and polytechnics in 1992; university colleges; specialist colleges; and FHE colleges) and all home countries of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

The second stage involved collection of questionnaire data, and two different instruments were used. An institutional questionnaire was sent out to the heads of careers services and the heads of HE (in FHE colleges) of all institutions with HE provision. The scope of the questions and the issues raised (Figure 1) were informed by the key informant interviews and the Careers Education Benchmark Statement (AGCAS, 2005). The original intention was to circulate a single questionnaire, but it became apparent early on in discussions with the project's advisers that someone able to offer an institutional perspective might not know, in sufficient detail, what was happening at the level of programme delivery. A second survey instrument was therefore provided to institutions to circulate in order to capture information about provision at the programme/unit level. This questionnaire gathered detail about the academic offer at programme/unit level.

In the final stage of the project, a selection of credit-bearing provision from both the key informant interviews and the outcomes of the questionnaire was identified to form a set of illustrative vignettes of practice. These were used in the final report to exemplify practice from across the sectors and home countries, and were drawn up with the co-operation of the lead people in each case.

Figure 1: The Scope of the Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1: Institution

- Overall nature of the provision
- Subject areas
- Levels of awards
- Levels of delivery
- Credit points attached
- Number of students involved
- Number of contact hours involved
- Role of personnel responsible for delivery
- Funding base
- Institutional alignment of the provision
- Origins and development
- Chronology
- Collaboration with other institutions
- Location of the career service within the institution

Questionnaire 2: Unit/Programme

- Level of award
- Level of delivery
- Credit points attached
- Number of students involved
- Number of contact hours involved
- Subject area
- Mode of delivery
- Institutional location of delivery
- Teaching and learning methods
- Formal specified learning outcomes
- Actual learning outcomes
- Personnel involved in delivery and assessment
- Content of the provision
- Assessment strategy and methods
- Evaluation strategies for the unit
- Collaboration with other institutions
- Summary description of the particular case study

Emergent issues

The research project threw up a number of issues in its design which have important implications for careers services in HE, the professionals who work in them, and institutional managers. These issues are examined here and their possible impact on practice is elaborated.

(i) Definition of terms

One early problem encountered by the team was the definition of credit-bearing careers education. There is significant variation in the definition used by practitioners, which hinders investigation. The definitions finally used in this project are shown in Figure 2. These were drawn up with advice from key informants and advisory group members, and with reference to the Careers Education Benchmark Statement (AGCAS, 2006). The aim was to be as clear as possible about the nature and the scope of the project, particularly in terms of the type of provision being studied. These definitions were circulated as part of the introductory letters, and respondents were encouraged to seek clarification if necessary.

Figure 2: Definitions Used in the Study (extract from the covering letter)

We consider credit-bearing careers education to be units/modules which contribute to the career planning or career management of students, for the next stage after completion of their degree programme or other course.

We consider:

- **CREDIT-BEARING** to mean units/modules that are assessed and count towards the final award either in terms of grades received at the end of the unit/module or in terms of being one of the constituent parts in the programme which may be assessed by final examination, or as a completion requirement.

- **CAREERS EDUCATION** to mean some form of learning which seeks to position and prepare the student for the next stage in their career. We are interested in units/modules where there is conscious development among the students of awareness of career opportunities or reflective capacities. This may take a variety of forms. It may be termed as a traditional "careers course" or it may focus on employability skills or may be allied with personal

development planning etc. It may be part of professional/vocational training where the learning outcomes are specifically designed to develop career planning aspects of **employability** in the students.

- The **NEXT STAGE** might be employment or postgraduate education or time out or unemployment or voluntary activities or community and domestic involvement.

If in doubt about whether a course counts as credit-bearing careers education, please contact us.

There are many issues relating to definition and scope but three had a particular impact on this project. Firstly, we had difficulty in defining the relationship between careers education and professional training in programmes such as medicine, social work and teaching. Our aim was to capture provision where the learning outcomes were specifically designed to cover career planning and to increase graduate employability, rather than all aspects of preparing students for their professional role. Despite our attempt at making this distinction, we felt that this provision was inadequately captured and probably led to under-recording in the results.

The definition is further confused by the use of terms with overlapping meaning, e.g. employability, careers education, career planning, career management, personal development planning. In addition, there are a number of developments within the HE curriculum which also overlap with credit-bearing careers education to a greater or lesser extent, such as key skills (QCA, 2000), work-related learning (Moreland, 2005), enterprise and entrepreneurship education (Hartshorn, 2002; Moreland, 2004). This diversity of terms makes it difficult to audit provision.

Finally, we attempted to define the 'next stage' broadly in order to encompass a range of activities that students might go on to, including paid work in a 'graduate' job. This broad definition was deliberate, as it was felt necessary to include activities such as postgraduate education, voluntary work and travel as these may be part of a graduate's career plan. Considering the impact of these types of activities on future career plans and trajectories is an important part of the careers education process.

(ii) Identifying the right gatekeepers

A second major issue was how to gather information on the full extent of the provision within an institution. It was very difficult to identify who to ask about this, as knowledge within institutions is often very dispersed, particularly in large institutions which have a devolved structure. We considered various 'gatekeepers', such as quality assurance officers, pro-vice chancellors (education), heads of academic services, and programme leaders, as well as heads of careers. Although quality assurance officers should have access to the programme specifications for all programmes within their institution, we were advised that such detail would be too difficult to gather. So we settled on heads of careers as the best placed professional officers to provide an institutional overview and access to relevant people at programme level; for FHE colleges we mailed our questionnaire to the 'head of careers or head of HE', as it is not uncommon for there to be no head of careers in such institutions. Once again, we suspect from evidence from the interviews that these decisions led to some under-recording of provision, for some of the reasons given below (in iii and v).

(iii) Knowledge of provision by the careers service staff

It became clear that the knowledge of individual programmes by careers advisers was patchy at best: it was common to come across credit-bearing provision within an institution of which the careers service was unaware. We found that some such provision within programmes may not have involved the careers service directly in its planning and validation. This is linked to the position of careers services within the institutional structures and the scope of their activity. Careers services are most commonly located within student services (61 percent of the responses) and as a result are unlikely to be involved in the planning of academic programmes within their institution. In addition, the location of the careers service in the institutional structure impacts on how the service is viewed by students, academic staff and the careers staff themselves. Where the careers service is embedded in student services, there is a danger that it will be associated with 'remedial' work, providing support for students at risk, and not with the academic offer. These issues were raised in a number of the interviews and questionnaire responses, exemplified by the following quotation:

> **It is sometimes difficult for careers services who are part of support departments to influence and drive the curriculum. If you are part of learning and teaching, it is easier to influence academic colleagues. Academic departments have a lot of autonomy in terms of developing their own curriculum which might create barriers for developing things developed and delivered outside those academic schools.**
>
> **(key informant interview)**

The implications of this for the research project were significant. It was difficult to rely on the data being provided by careers service staff on the scope and scale of credit-bearing provision within institutions, particularly large ones, as they were often only aware of provision with which they were directly involved. Many careers services operate a system of individual careers staff working closely with a group of academic departments, which can help them gain an institutional picture, but there was almost certainly an under-recording of provision due to their lack of involvement in specific programme development and validation.

Some programmes have career planning and management embedded as part of the programme rubric, and unless careers staff work directly with these programmes, they may be unaware of this integrated provision. A good example of this is the new foundation degree award. There were only 11 reported incidences of credit-bearing provision in foundation degrees in the questionnaire returns. This is surprising, as explicit job-related education is part of the requirement for such degrees, and assessment should include a record of achievement and an individualised career plan evidenced through transcripts and personal development portfolios. As there are 2,720 programmes listed on the Foundation Degree Forward website (accessed May 2006), this indicates that either programmes which explicitly include such provision were excluded by the respondents, or the respondents were unaware of the provision. One of our key informants illustrated the type of confusion which might have existed more widely. She indicated uncertainty about whether to include a description of the foundation degrees in her interview, as she was not sure if the content (which included business, communications and employability skills, as well as industry knowledge) was relevant to our research. Although development of more integrated provision could be increased by careers staff becoming more involved in curriculum development, there may be implications here for the training of careers staff in curriculum and pedagogical practice.

(iv) Relationship with institutional practice

Another issue for the research project was how far credit-bearing careers education is embedded in institutional policies. A number of the key informants worked in institutions which had a clearly articulated policy for students gaining embedded careers education, and the institutional questionnaires asked about its origins. Under half of the responses overall indicated that credit-bearing provision was enshrined in institutional policy. The results also revealed an interesting difference between institutional type and origins of the provision, with only 18 percent of the responses from pre-92 universities indicating the existence of an institutional policy encompassing credit-bearing provision, in contrast to 44 percent of post-92 institutions.

(v) Response rates

In the project, we were aiming for the most comprehensive coverage possible. We mailed to 394 institutions and received completed questionnaires from 117. The overall response rate was 30 percent. The project team made a significant effort to boost the overall response rate through follow up emails, telephone calls and publicity distribution. Figure 3 shows the response rates broken down by institutional type and home country. The numbers in the cells show the number of responses and the number of questionnaires sent out (in brackets). The percentage response rates are given in the end rows and columns.

The overall response rates were affected by a very low response from FHE and specialist colleges (19 percent and 25 percent, respectively). This is significant in producing a low overall response rate, as these colleges represented 65 percent of the total number sent out (256/394 institutions). Evidence from the interviews and follow-up telephone enquiries suggested that these figures reflect a very low rate of provision in FHE institutions. The overall response rates therefore may have suffered from non-providers being more likely not to return questionnaires, despite being asked to make nil returns.

Figure 3: Questionnaire Response Rates

Institution Type	England	Scotland	Wales	N.Ireland	Total
Pre-1992 University	29 (51)	5 (8)	4 (7)	1 (2)	57%
Post-1992 University	20 (48)	0 (5)	2 (2)	0 (0)	40%
University College	4 (8)	1 (2)	1 3)	0 (2)	40%
Specialist College	8 (30)	1 (5)	0 (1)	0 (0)	25%
FHE College	34 (165)	4 (24)	1 (16)	2 (15)	19%
Total	31%	25%	28%	16%	30%

In terms of the universities and university colleges, the response rate for the institutional questionnaire was much higher (49 percent). In telephone conversations with a sample of universities who had not returned the questionnaires, there was a high proportion which did not have credit-bearing provision. The results from the survey are therefore likely to be more representative of the provision than the raw data suggested, with at least some of the 'no returns' more likely to be 'nil returns'.

The pattern by home country shows very low responses for FHE and specialist colleges across the board, and a higher response rate from England than from the other home countries (although total numbers of institutions in England are much higher). At institutional level, 41 percent of the returns indicated the presence of credit-bearing provision (Figure 4). Of those institutions which provided credit-bearing careers education, less than half of the pre-1992 universities and university colleges which responded offered it (49 percent and 33 percent), whereas most of the post-1992 universities and specialist colleges did (82 percent and 66 percent). Of the 41 FHE colleges which responded, only a small number (6, or 15 percent) actually offered credit-bearing careers education.

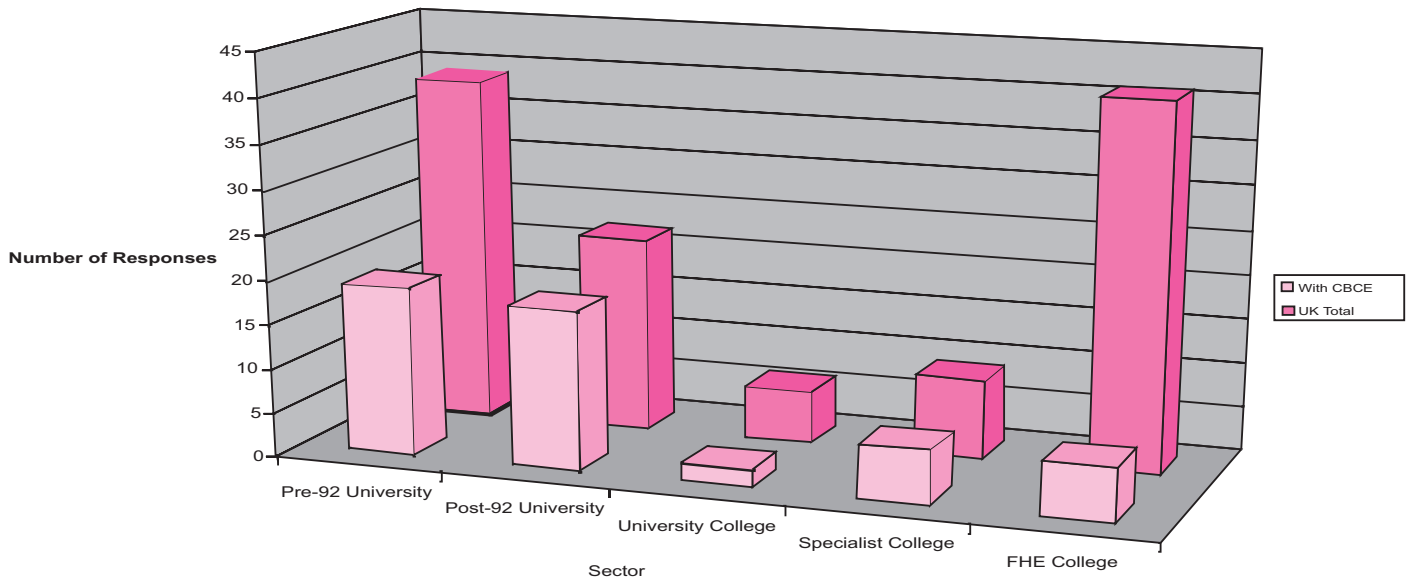
It is interesting that the sectors which indicated the highest proportion of credit-bearing careers education were the post-92 universities and the specialist colleges. This may reflect their more vocational nature and/or a greater focus on teaching and student support. One key informant, from an English post-1992 university, suggested a further reason for the relative popularity of credit-bearing provision in post-1992 universities:

> **These universities are interested in widening participation and introducing PDP because of the kind of students they have who need something of this nature. They are not courted by employers. It is more difficult for the students at new universities in the employment market.**
>
> **(key informant interview)**

(vi) FHE colleges and credit-bearing careers education

Some of our key informants spoke about the difficulty of FHE colleges providing credit-bearing careers education. One referred to the isolation of franchised colleges from her university college in terms of careers provision. Another mentioned the small numbers of HE students in most FHE colleges, making it difficult to offer credit-bearing careers education. Another suggested that as his post-1992 university had little interest, there was little chance of its franchised colleges having such provision, since in such cases it is the university which largely determine the nature of the curriculum. One key informant, working in a post-1992 university, said that most of her university's franchised colleges focused their careers provision through Connexions for a younger age-group and that older students were likely to receive little careers advice. Careers provision was viewed as a 'bolt-on' to the main business of FHE colleges. In addition, careers provision in FHE colleges is often individualised, so there is little careers education located in the curriculum. There are, therefore, significant issues for HEIs which are validating provision in FHE colleges in terms of equity of experience for HE students with their counterparts in HEIs, and the model of careers education which should be provided in such collaborative arrangements.

Figure 4: Institutions with credit-bearing careers education



Conclusions

The previous section considered some of the methodological issues faced by the research team which, in turn, raise important questions for careers services, careers professionals and institutional managers in HE. These questions, in my view, should form part of the debate on what kind of careers services we need in future. The list is not exhaustive, but some questions are:

How can the terminology associated with careers provision be clarified?
Without clarity, it will be difficult for careers professionals to argue for more involvement in determining the academic offer. The importance of developing graduate employability relies on the curriculum becoming more of a vehicle for delivering some of the key skills, knowledge and messages for career planning and management. To get these messages across to the whole student population in a meaningful way, careers professionals need to engage with pedagogy, including assessment. Clarity about the nature and scope of credit-bearing careers education is an essential first step, particularly if academic colleagues are to be convinced of its importance.

How far is the location of the careers service within the institutional structure an impediment to careers education becoming more embedded within programmes?
The location of careers services within student services seems to have an impact on how the service is viewed by academic staff, students and the careers staff themselves, and this may be a significant barrier in some institutions to careers education becoming embedded in the academic offer. Where careers services are part of academic services or a separate service, there is some evidence that careers staff find it easier to engage with the academic offer. Given the fact that this is true in a minority of institutions (15 percent in this survey), senior managers will need to consider how best to facilitate careers education development.

Should the process of validation of new programmes routinely involve careers staff?
This research suggests that it is unusual for careers staff to be involved in programme development and validation. Yet if programmes are to become more 'demand-led', labour market analysis, employer engagement and graduate employability are likely to become even more important elements of whether programmes are fit for purpose. Attendant issues include the development of effective models of engagement for careers staff with programme development, and identification of the implications for the training of careers staff. If the academic community is to welcome careers advisers into curriculum teams, then it will be necessary for careers advisers to have a credible understanding of the process of curriculum design and pedagogic practice and their specialist professional knowledge.

What is the appropriate professional model for careers staff in today's HE environment?
Following on from the previous point, there may well be room for debate about the professional competences required by careers professionals if they are to play a full part in developing the employability agenda. Innovative examples of practice intended to develop professional skills are beginning to be found in the sector. These include, for example, careers staff becoming part of programme development teams, the use of peer review processes in delivery to develop pedagogic practice, and careers staff following programmes in learning and teaching alongside new lecturing staff.

Should institutions have a policy on careers education embedded in academic programmes?
The results of this research suggest that this is the exception rather than the rule, particularly in pre-92 universities. Clearly, in many departments in many institutions, having an articulated policy on what should be in the curriculum would be highly controversial. However, the importance for students of careers education in developing their employability and their ability to make a return on their investment in HE should make the sector think carefully about how best to deliver this element of the student experience. This may be even more critical in long-term participation rates, as the students of today advise their own children of the benefits of investing in HE in the future.

In this article I have raised a number of what I believe are key questions and issues for careers educators in developing credit-bearing careers education further. These questions were raised directly from the challenges of developing the research methodology and undertaking the project on credit-bearing provision. The full results from the project are available and give the reader a snapshot of current provision across the sector (Foskett and Johnston, 2006). Further development of this provision will require the sector to answer the questions raised here. Enhancing graduate employability is likely to remain a key aim in the foreseeable future and to be driven through into HE strategy by the use of funding levers. Although there have been challenges to the notion that investment in human capital is the key to economic well-being (Morley, 2001), a focus on employability is here to stay. As Yorke suggests: 'the notion of employability has far too much face validity for politicians to abandon it' (Yorke, 2004, p.3).

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Research into Career-related Interventions for Higher Education: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?

Jenny Bimrose and Jane Artess

This article relates to the findings of a systematic literature review (Bimrose, Barnes and Brown, 2005) that was undertaken on behalf of HECSU. The review is part of a broader research programme funded by HECSU, referred to as *Career Making*, which comprises a five/six-year HE student tracking study, *Futuretrack*, and a range of subsidiary studies on issues emerging from Futuretrack and other contemporary research. The other major component of 'Career Making' is an initiative referred to as PROP *(Putting Research Outcomes into Practice)* which brings together career guidance practitioners and researchers in developing innovative ways of using research evidence. The literature review was a key component in launching *Career Making* and in establishing the extent and nature of existing literature on this topic.

The main question to be addressed by the review, specified by HECSU, was: 'What curricular and extra-curricular interventions appear to assist students and graduates to make career-related decisions, engage in career learning/development, and progress towards entry into the labour market?' The related sub-question was: 'What social, economic, or demographic factors appear to impact upon career decision-making, career learning and occupational progression?' A systematic review methodology was used, based on the work of the EPPI-Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London (for further details, see: http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/). Crucial to this process is the rigorous monitoring and recording of all the references selected and screened. Whilst this approach was found to have some limitation (for example, restricting the scope for researcher discretion in selecting texts for inclusion) it provided a sound framework for undertaking a comprehensive and transparent assessment of available research. In this review, researcher judgement did play a significant role. This was justified on the basis that the research team possesses very considerable prior knowledge of the operation of career development in higher education in the UK.

Career-related interventions in higher education, together with their impact on students' career-related decisions, career learning and progression towards the labour market have been well researched. Initial searches yielded 77,272 references. Of the 18,189 references identified for inclusion in the in-depth review, a rigorous process of progressive focusing enabled a total of 59 empirical studies to be selected as the basis for the review (for full details of the methodology, see Bimrose *et al.*, 2005). Countries from which studies originated included the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Taiwan, Brazil, Europe and Australia. Whilst the review process yielded a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, little relevant longitudinal research was found.

This article will: summarise the findings of the review; explore constraints which operate on career decision-making processes; discuss the implications for policy and practice; and identify future research needs.

Career-related interventions for higher education

Career-related decision-making, career learning/development and progression are regarded as desirable outcomes from a wide range of interventions provided to support individuals in making successful career transitions throughout their lifetimes (Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes and Orton, 2004). However, there is little clarity about the precise nature of the interventions that are required to achieve these outcomes, or the conditions necessary to support their successful implementation. Even at a basic level, career progression is contested. For example, whilst some regard it essentially as a technically rational and linear process (Holland, 1992), others argue that it is the result of more affective processes (Savickas, 1997), whilst yet others that it is constrained largely by external factors (Roberts, 1997). Similarly, there are varied conceptions of career learning and how this relates to career-decision making (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Hodkinson *et al.* 1997). There exists, therefore, a wide and fluid framework within which what 'counts' for this literature review had to be determined.

Relatively little evidence was found on career-related pre-entry interventions and interventions for graduates. Similarly, defining and searching for 'extra-curricular' interventions proved complex, as this term is broad and

encompasses a variety of activities. Researcher judgement has therefore been critical to the process of identifying activities categorised under this heading. Curricular interventions were easier to define. From the empirical studies collected, it appears that that much of the evidence relates to on-course curricular and extra-curricular interventions, with similar numbers of studies on these two types of interventions included in the review. Six distinctive categories emerged from the literature relating to the main review question: career-related interventions; curricular interventions to support vocational trajectories; curricular-related interventions; extra-curricular interventions; pre-entry curricular interventions; and multicultural curricular interventions. Brief summaries of findings on each of these are summarised next.

Findings

For specialist career-related interventions, evaluations were generally positive. These comprised career courses and modules, computer programs designed to support, for example, career decision-making, one-to-one interviews and e-guidance. Curricular interventions to support vocational trajectories have been designed to support the choice of a subject specialism for particular vocational areas (for example, medical-related careers, like nursing or surgical specialism). Examples of curricular-related interventions are mentoring and shadowing, both used successfully to support groups of under-represented students in their career progression. Structured work-placement schemes are an example of extra-curricular interventions used to develop career learning and decision-making, with positive evaluations of their impact usually provided by participants. Of the range of pre-entry curricular interventions (such as structured support programmes for students from a district with poor educational provision), many were used constructively to support transitions into higher education of under-represented groups. Finally, multicultural curricular interventions (like involvement of parents and/or elders, peer support) for targeted groups (for example, minority ethnic groups on science, engineering and mathematics courses) have been found to enhance career-decision-making and learning.

An important finding from the review was that although there is a substantial literature on different interventions, which may influence students' learning, progression and career-decision making, evidence relating to the efficacy of these interventions is limited. However, three issues need to be highlighted when considering omissions in evidence available in academic journals. The first is that the orientation of those designing or implementing curricular or extra-curricular interventions may be driven by pragmatism, with a focus on 'what works'. It may not, therefore, be a priority for practitioners to publish findings from evaluations undertaken following implementation.

The second issue relates to possible problems of the transferability of interventions to other contexts. Curricular interventions not only have to be fit for purpose: they also have to be fit for context. The third issue is that significant attempts to support career learning and development are often not distinct curriculum interventions, but rather built into the initial framework and curricular thinking of many programmes in higher education (for example, Foundation Degrees). It may, therefore, be the case that significant progress has been made in establishing which interventions are effective in particular learning contexts, but that this has not been documented, so is not available in the literature.

Constraints on career decision-making and learning

The sub-question for review was: What social, economic or demographic factors appear to impact upon career decision-making, career learning and career progression. Gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background were all found to influence career-related behaviour, with career-related interventions designed and implemented to counter some of the more negative impacts. Other constraints on the career behaviour of students were identified as the individual's experience of the higher education environment, age and disability.

Whether the research populations used were new graduates, women returners or undergraduates, gender emerged as a significant factor in career-related behaviour. For example, a strong relationship was found to exist between gender and subject choice or gender and employment. Similarly, ethnicity and race are strong influences on career decision-making, career learning and occupational progression. Existing evidence on socio-economic factors relates to parental income, financial constraints more generally and student perceptions of the value of educational qualifications to their career progression. Whilst no studies were identified that specifically identified disability or age, limited evidence on cross-cutting disadvantage is beginning to develop (for example, the combined affects of age and socio-economic status, or of disability and age).

Evaluating effectiveness

Models that have been developed to evaluate the effectiveness of career guidance interventions are limited in number. Indeed, it has been suggested (Sampson *et al.*, 2003) that the apparent lack of progress in the development of useful accountability and evaluation models is linked to the absence of conceptual and operational constructs that define the outputs of career service interventions.

In seeking to assess and measure the effectiveness of career-related interventions in higher education, it is crucial to understand and take account of existing complex inter-relationships and variables. This includes: the way that individuals vary in respect of their personal circumstances, such as gender, age, ethnicity and attainment; the contexts in which clients operate, that vary in relation to their domestic situation, geographical location, mobility and labour market status; and the career-related interventions to which individuals have access, in terms of the type, intensity and duration of the intervention(s), the resources available, the nature of the specific needs of clients, the experience and training of the practitioner, and the discrete nature of provision (for instance, whether it is experienced as a specific activity or as part of an integrated, on-going learning programme).

Additional issues include: how should change in the student/client participating in career-related interventions be evaluated; and which sources of information should be used to evaluate resulting changes (i.e. the student/client, the practitioner, a 'significant other', or perhaps an independent expert in career guidance)? Whilst the student/client's perspective is important, potential complexities need to be acknowledged. For example, whilst some benefits of effective career-related interventions are immediate and recognisable (e.g. entry to an educational course) others are likely to accrue over an extended time period. It is not unusual for student/clients to recognise only with the benefit of hindsight over a number of years that career interventions contributed to their personal development. Additionally, the extent to which beneficiaries of career guidance are able to distinguish and recognise the value of an effective career guidance intervention in enhancing their educational progress is likely to be problematic, since student/clients may place more value on tangible results (e.g. placement into a career) than on the process of the intervention itself. Finally, a positive and valuable outcome might be facilitating a student/client's acceptance that their aspirations are unavailable. This could be (and often is) regarded negatively by the participants in the intervention, even though retrospectively its value is recognised (Bimrose, 2004).

Research gaps and future research

The parameters of this review were defined by the review question and sub-question. However, reframing the main question (What curricular and extra-curricular interventions appear to assist students and graduates to make career-related decisions, engage in career learning/development and progress towards entry into the labour market?) into two separate parts helps point to omissions in the existing research evidence. The first part of the question re-framed for this purpose would relate to the curricular and extra-curricular interventions that are designed to support career learning/development, broadly defined. The second would relate to how students and graduates make career-related decisions, engage in career learning/development and progress towards entry into the labour market. Additionally, it may be helpful to reflect upon which theories of learning underpin interventions designed to support more informed career-related learning and development. Overall, the review argues for future research that is theoretically-informed and goes beyond a consideration of which interventions work to an examination of how they work.

Given the challenges inherent in evaluating the outcomes of career guidance, the most obvious need is for longitudinal research that tracks the development of career biographies of individuals as they move into, through and out of higher education at different phases of their lives, with special reference to their engagement (or not) with particular curricular or extra-curricular interventions designed to support their career learning and development. These 'career narratives' would not only be invaluable in understanding career learning and development, but crucially they could also be adapted as a tool to help the career decision-making, learning and development of students and graduates. Additionally, they could form the basis for multi-professional collaboration between careers practitioners, teaching staff and researchers in finding more robust ways to conceptualise the process of career learning and development.

Conclusions

Conclusions that can be drawn from the review are limited due, at least in part, to the restricted nature of the research available, particularly in relation to: problems defining 'curricular' and 'extra-curricular' interventions; limited evidence on the influence and efficacy of interventions; and often impressionistic reporting of soft outcomes from interventions. For example, some articles identified in the full review include how one-to-one career interventions were found useful by students as they gave access to specialist knowledge, supported positive outcomes, provided a positive experience, and promoted constructive change. However, disadvantaged students found this type of intervention of limited value unless practitioners had specialist knowledge of their circumstances and needs. Multicultural curriculum interventions appear to have the potential to support entry to and progression within higher education, provided these interventions focus on the particular needs of target groups. Research evidence also suggests that mentoring offers multiple advantages and has been used successfully to support under-represented students (e.g. minority ethnic students) and those entering non-traditional areas (e.g. women into science). Access courses continue to provide an effective means of supporting career decision-making, learning and progression, and the benefits of different types of structured work-experience were highlighted. Finally, the potential of e-guidance as a positive initiative is indicated.

Within career-related guidance and support in HE, the role of the career guidance practitioner is central in the articulation of both student needs and the range and type of intervention offered; the boundary between researcher and practitioner in this context is often unclear and overlapping. This leads us to consider the place of practitioner research (or action research or reflective practice) as a route to better understand why interventions are developed and utilised. In particular we are currently pursuing practitioner research through the PROP project; here we are exploring not only practitioners' understanding of researched findings but also the ways in which they make 'professional sense' of and use researched findings within the context of their own practice. To do this we are setting up a series of projects, where researchers and practitioners working together develop innovative ways of responding to issues raised by the review and other relevant research.

Finally, the findings of this first review suggest that whilst there is much to celebrate in relation to the potential of interventions to have positive effect on outcomes, there remains a need for further research to be undertaken before career guidance practice can be claimed to be delivered within a robust theoretical framework.

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The Impact of Career Management Interventions in Higher Education

Glenn Crust

One of the aims of UK higher education (HE) is to encourage students to develop a critical stance, broadly speaking to examine the merits and defects of any idea or belief. It seems therefore appropriate that higher education careers services should also critically examine their own performance, for example through quality standard accreditation processes.

This paper sets out to explore *why* it is important to evaluate the impact and analyse the costs and benefits of career management interventions, discusses some of the difficulties associated with such evaluation, and offers some proposals to underpin more effective practice. The MS Excel spreadsheet and User Guide 'Cost Effective Career Development' available from http://www.rdg.ac.uk/ccms/events/Parallel_day1.php explore *how* the cost effectiveness of career management interventions might be estimated.

Employability

Cost-effective career management is part of a broader aspiration for cost-effective higher education. Aston (2003) questions whether all university education delivers excellent value for money to students. Measuring students' value for money and return on investment is not straightforward. Many intangible student outcomes are associated with higher education: for example, a history of accomplishment, positive self-efficacy beliefs and a robust sense of capability. As a higher education outcome, employability is sometimes criticised as being rather limited, but perhaps it is unexamined social and personal constructs of employability that are responsible for this criticism. Broader understandings of employability might include the motivation and ability to add value in a range of informal 'employment', such as managing a children's football team, organising a group holiday or supporting a partner and children's emotional well-being.

Evidence of a problem

This section outlines evidence of difficulties with on-programme career management learning that careers specialists encounter in higher education.

Evidence from UK HE careers guidance professionals

In July 2005 I used AGCAS-SERVICELINK to survey UK higher education careers advisers to explore pre-entry guidance and embedded career management in higher education institutions (HEIs). The survey received responses from 27 HEIs, a low response rate, but including both new and old universities from across the UK. In their responses, higher education careers specialists:

- estimated that underdeveloped career management skills were a major obstacle to securing graduate-level employment for around half of undergraduate finalists[1];
- reported that undergraduate courses typically used occasional teaching with little or no assessment to develop graduates' ability to manage their careers and professional development;
- typically rated graduates' career management performance as ineffective.

Fewer than 40% of respondents described students as typically receiving good value for money from HE as a stepping stone into a graduate-level working life.

Evidence from curriculum-based career management learning

This next section explores two curriculum-based career management programmes at the University of Plymouth:

- Geography and Careers, a credit-rated module for around 170 stage-three students;
- Pre-Placement Preparation, a module with no academic assessment for all stage-two Faculty of Technology students.

Careers advisers compared the results of assessed on-programme career management activities (such as written application assignments, selection interview simulations and written career planning assignments) with indications of graduates' actual early career management performance from DLHE data (for the geographers) and industry placement records (for the technology students).

An end-of-module evaluation indicated that 84% of geography finalists agreed that the Geography and Careers module was a valuable part of their undergraduate

[1] The survey asked 'In your experience, underdeveloped career management skills (i.e. self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision making and transition skills) are a major obstacle to securing graduate level employment for what proportion of undergraduate finalists (not necessarily at your institution)?' and offered five possible responses: (a) Less than 20%; (b) 20 to 40%; (c) 40 to 60%; (d) 60 to 80%; (e) More than 80%. The responses were (a):3; (b):7; (c):14; (d):6; (e):2. The number of responses (32) exceeds the number of HEIs (27) that responded to the survey because more than one AGCAS-SERVICELINK user responded from some HEIs.

education. Only one student disagreed with this statement. Perhaps surprisingly, on-programme assessment indicated that relatively few (perhaps 10%) of the final-year geographers wrote application forms which careers advisers expected would attract interviews, and that many struggled to provide compelling evidence of graduate competencies commonly valued by employers. Nonetheless, evidence from the DLHE survey suggests that 56% of graduates entered occupations described as graduate-level by Elias and Purcell (2004), with an additional number in subject-related trainee positions, for example in town planning.

Results from the non-credit bearing Faculty of Technology industry placement preparation programme followed a similar pattern. Having sensibly prioritised deadlines for assessed coursework from other parts of the degree programme, very few students achieved module learning outcomes, such as demonstrating an awareness of their strengths and skills by attempting a CV writing coursework. Nonetheless, many students successfully secured rewarding industry placements.

In the case of both programmes, the assessment results did not reliably predict the students' career management performance. We therefore began to wonder whether the assessments did not sufficiently recognise some of their learning and development.

Evidence from performance development through the HE experience

Computer-assisted assessment data from the stage-three Geography and Careers module provided evidence of difficulties underlying students' patchy career management performance. Their STAR (situation, target, action, results) responses to competency-based questions revealed:

- limited high-level experience: few students provided performance development evidence from challenging *situations*;
- limited drive to improve their performance: students seldom described setting themselves demanding *targets*;
- limited initiative in students' *action*: students often simply described following standard procedures;
- limited achievement: students often described *results* such as 'the presentation went well and we received a good grade'.

Reviewing the results of this kind of final-year assignment highlights the developmental opportunities that are available to, but are often missed by, students during their university lives. Knight and Yorke (2002) identify self theories such as malleable intelligence and efficacy beliefs that underpin graduates' employability and can be changed through positive interventions. Higher education in the round, including sports, clubs and societies, social activities, work-based learning and performance management systems (such as personal tutoring and PDP) underpins and grows students' employability.

Evidence from correlating DLHE data and career management module scores

We had expected competent career managers to secure the more attractive and better-paid early career employment; however, there was little consistent correlation between finalists' Geography and Careers module scores and their DLHE salaries. Nonetheless, closer inspection of the DLHE data revealed that the students with the higher module scores were able to use their degree to greater advantage (DLHE field 15) in selecting an early graduate occupation. There appeared to be some evidence of a link between students' on-programme career management performance and their subsequent graduate employment destinations.

Warburton (2000) reminds us that correlation does not necessarily suggest cause. It suits careers advisers to believe that a correlation between the Geography and Careers module scores and early career management performance is evidence of the effectiveness of the module. But we might also entertain alternative explanations: for example, that the students who are more organised and motivated are likely to achieve higher module scores and secure higher-level jobs. Similarly, trainers might prefer to believe that teaching career management skills will produce competent career managers, but many higher education careers specialists recognise the development of career management behaviours as a symptom of some more profound development in the student's motivations and beliefs.

Understanding the difficulties

This section explores three difficulties that may reduce the impact of curriculum-based career management interventions.

The hidden curriculum

Evidence from the stage-three Geography and Careers module evaluation forms demonstrates that when students are invited to describe how their higher education experience has prepared them for professional life, some (in the words of one student) 'end up lying to produce something easily markable'. Snyder (1971) described a hidden curriculum, which students discover and address in order to pass academic assessments.

Egan (2002) describes three stages explored by the client in a developmental process: *What's going on?, What solutions make sense to me?, and How do I get what I want or need?* The DOTS model describes three similar tasks: *self-awareness raising, opportunity awareness raising,* and *decision making.*

Students attending to Snyder's hidden curriculum may respond to the three stages of these models without necessarily achieving any significant career management learning.

Diagram 1

Egan Model Stages	DOTS Model Stages	Hidden Curriculum
What's going on?	Where am I know?	"I am at the beginning of an academic module"
What solutions make sense to me?	Where do I want to be?	"67%" (i.e. a good academic grade)
Hoe do I get what I want or need?	How will I get there?	"I will write an assignment that will satisfy the assessment criteria set out in the module handbook"

Career management is a context where differences between the value added by deep and surface learning are particularly conspicuous; students who are actually doing something, in addition to writing something, about managing their careers tend to occupy the graduate-level jobs in the DLHE data.

The process of change

Both the academic and popular literatures provide process-based descriptions of human development and growth. Authors such as Gyatso (the current Dalai Lama) and Cutler (1998), and Prochaska and DiClemente (1992) examine the determinants of change. Both put forward five-stage process models in which each stage forms part of the conditions necessary to bring about the next stage; effective action is very unlikely in the absence of preceding underpinning stages.

Gyatso and Cutler describe learning as a first step in bringing about change. This helps to develop conviction, which in turn strengthens the determination to change that underpins action and effort. Prochaska and DiClemente describe *pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action* and *maintenance*, and highlight the importance of relapse as a sixth component which may replace any of the previous five. In Prochaska and DiClemente's view: 'People, including professionals, often erroneously equate action with change. As a consequence, they overlook the requisite work that prepares changers for action and the important efforts necessary to maintain the changes following action' (1992, p.1104).

All of these authors recognise the significance of a process underpinning action. Prochaska and DiClemente suggest interventions that are appropriate to clients at various stages in their development, and suggest that 'professionals approaching communities and worksites with only action-oriented programs are likely to underserve, misserve, or not serve the majority of their target population.' This seems consistent with our experience of delivering action-oriented curriculum-based career management programmes. Students give the appearance of change but in the absence of *conviction or preparation* often achieve only surface learning.

From this perspective, it is hardly surprising that undergraduates under-perform during pre-placement and final-year career management modules. The modules occur in term one of stages two and three of their programmes. At this stage most students prioritise academic achievement and are *pre-contemplative* or *contemplative* in terms of Prochaska and DiClemente's Transtheoretical Model. The action into which credit-rated assessments will drive students is action without psychological *preparation*. In this state, students are unlikely to express sentiments described by Prochaska and DiClemente as characterising the *action* stage. These might be paraphrased in terms of career management as 'I am really working hard to manage my career' or 'Anyone can talk about managing their career; I am actually doing something about it'.

In a study of social and cognitive factors affecting student learning performance, Jakubowski and Dembo (2002) describe assessing undergraduate's readiness to change using a study skills inventory, based on the University of Rhode Island Change Assessment Scale (URICA) developed by McConnaughy, Prochaska and Velicer in 1983. Moving from measurement to intervention, Prochaska et al. (2001) propose strategies for supporting change at each stage. Similar approaches might add value to career management learning practice in higher education.

Career management programmes that acknowledge readiness to change may be able to move students through *pre-contemplation* and *contemplation*, so that students are more able to move independently into *preparation, action* and *maintenance*. Unfortunately, many finalists will not re-engage with career management until they have completed their dissertations and exams. They then pass into the *preparation* and *action* stages of their career management, but may be disadvantaged in the labour market by the number of new graduates and by employers' recruitment timetables.

Factors influencing students' career management performance

It is important to understand other issues that significantly influence finalists' performance, so that these can be accommodated in designing career management interventions. Clearly, developing such an understanding could be a lifetime's work, so this section indicates opportunities to inform our practice from this literature by outlining two examples.

For some time, psychologists such as Yerkes and Dodson (1908) have recognised a link between arousal and performance. When highly aroused, for example anxious or upset, people perform simple work well, but struggle with complex tasks. The Yerkes-Dodson Law suggests that finalists facing challenging stage-three modules and completing independent research projects are likely to struggle with complex tasks such as accurately assessing their strengths, values and preferences, systematically surveying opportunities, making well-informed decisions, and presenting themselves effectively to employers.

While mid-life higher education careers advisers may seek to satisfy self-esteem needs through work, Maslow (1970) suggests that students may tend to focus on safety needs such as paying the rent before attending to higher-level needs as they plan their transition into graduate life. This may be a particular difficulty for students from families who do not seek to satisfy self-esteem needs through work, and for younger students who have no experience of successfully meeting their own security needs. The DLHE questionnaire invites graduates to describe their reasons for taking their job, and response options such as "It fitted into my career plan" or "In order to earn a living" may indicate which needs the graduate aimed to address through their work.

The benefits of assessing impact and cost effectiveness

Metrics are a more significant feature of the quality-management literature around manufacturing than around service industries. Authors such as Oakland (2003) describe why measurement is needed: for example,

- to ensure that customers' needs are met;
- for setting standards, objectives and improvement priorities;
- to provide feedback to drive improvement;
- to provide a visible scoreboard with which individuals can monitor and improve their personal performance;
- to justify the use of resources;
- to indicate the cost of poor quality.

Clearly, measuring the impact of career management interventions and the employability of graduates can inform the process of improving career management interventions. Watts and Dent (2006) discuss a range of approaches to measuring the productivity of career management interventions, comparing economic, social, behavioural and learning outcomes, and reviewing impact and cost effectiveness meta-studies. They encourage careers services to examine their opportunities for improving productivity, and identify a creative potential that drives service development in the tensions between business modernisers' concern with modern efficient systems and professional guardians' attention to professional standards (Watts, 2005).

Carl Rogers (1967) asserted that 'the facts are always friendly'. If our best-integrated curriculum-based career management module fails to engage up to half of participants, then Rogers suggests we are better off acknowledging this, questioning constraints that limit performance, and addressing those limitations, for example by influencing the development of personal tutoring and what Pauline Kneale (2004) refers to as Performance Development Planning (PDP).

In practice, examining difficulties with our work is not straightforward. The process of bidding for and presenting the results of employability projects typically involves a focus on the positive that retreats from a balanced critical view. Tensions exist between pragmatic management and rigorous quality review and improvement in institutional practice. Merton (1973) describes these difficulties. Many co-ordinated institutional practices such as teaching are underpinned by a shared commitment to accepted beliefs which are maintained by loyalty, adherence and respect. Detached scrutiny may not be immediately welcomed when it challenges these attitudes, but, as Zella King and Lucinda Becker suggested at the 2007 CCMS conference, it is likely to inspire the confidence of academics' colleagues who operate Merton's organised scepticism as a professional norm.

The most significant practical purpose of career management performance indicators may be to engage academics in a dialogue around what constitutes a successful career outcome from their programme and how this can most economically be achieved. This can:

- serve as a prelude to embedding career management and student Performance Development Planning (PDP) activities in the curriculum and the broader student experience;
- provide careers advisers with evidence to influence curriculum design and student performance management systems such as personal tutorials and Performance Development Planning;

- enable a responsive service to avoid being drawn away from its expertise by naïve requests such as 'Can you do a careers talk for the finalists?' from influential academics.

Career management interventions

Evaluating the performance of career management interventions through academic assessment is difficult because:

- outcomes that are easily measured, such as the quality of written applications, may be less meaningful indications of career management performance than outcomes that are more difficult to measure, such as students' ability to vary the content of their written applications with the requirements of the opportunity, or students' progress through Prochaska and DiClemente's stages of change;
- students addressing the hidden curriculum may achieve high scores with little career management learning;
- on-programme career management performance may not be a reliable predictor of graduate career management performance: at the time of the assessment student performance may be affected by factors such as other coursework deadlines;
- students' difficulties with self-assessment may mask career management performance in self-audits.

Employability performance indicators

The MS Excel spreadsheet and User Guide 'Cost Effective Career Development' sets out a method for estimating the cost-effectiveness of career management interventions. This tool is intended:

- to demonstrate that it is possible to investigate impact and cost-effectiveness, and promote basic data collection - for example, success rates from employment interview preparation;
- to disaggregate the impact of students' self-directed career management from the impact of curriculum-based interventions;
- to provide evidence of the benefits of credit-bearing assessment, that can be used in negotiations with academic programmes;
- to inform the development of methods for measuring quality and supporting improvement.

In the spreadsheet, cost-effectiveness is calculated as 'the number of hours (of careers adviser time) per appropriate job offer (for the student or graduate)'. This is not a perfect performance indicator. It ignores other positive outcomes from career management interventions, and must accommodate uncertainties about what constitutes an 'appropriate' job for the individual graduate.

Nonetheless, this performance indicator is not a completely arbitrary measure. Employers describe seeking graduates with any track record of employing their 'know-how', so early paid employment might be expected to indicate graduates' broad capacity to add value. Furthermore, it is possible to examine graduates' early career management performance from the DLHE data. For example, few effective career managers will be in full-time employment:

- that is classified as 'non-graduate' by Elias and Purcell (DLHE field 11), and
- in which their degree is no advantage (DLHE field 15), and
- that pays a salary of less than perhaps £14,000 (DLHE field 14), and
- that was the best or only job offer they received (DLHE field 18).

Transparency

As Rogers suggests, transparency is not without its benefits. For example, presenting stage-one students with a complete list of the job titles, employers and salaries of their programme's most recent graduates enables them to recognise the opportunities and pitfalls associated with their higher education, and may move them towards career management *action.* Presenting students with similar data for other programmes can promote discussion and stimulate demand for on-programme career management learning. It is our experience that presenting this DLHE data to students in the presence of senior academics stimulates demand for on-programme career management learning from all sides. In a similar way, candid discussions about the impact of career management interventions present opportunities to name and explore ownership of the difficulties, and to work together to devise more effective solutions.

Managing increased demand for career management learning

Involving students and academics in a transparent discussion of graduate employability is likely to increase demand for on-programme career management learning. This can provide an opportunity to review the role of the careers service.

It is clearly not feasible for careers advisers to deliver learning opportunities to all stages of all programmes across an HEI, so a discussion of this sort is an opportunity to reassert the expertise of careers specialists as:

- career management learning and teaching experts;
- capability builders, providing academic staff development opportunities and support;
- resource co-developers, with an enthusiasm for adapting and handing over resources to academic colleagues;
- career management learning quality managers.

Conclusions: towards more effective practice

Career management performance is an important factor determining students' ability to add value in their graduate lives, and there is scope for improving the performance of curriculum-based career management learning in higher education.

There are opportunities to improve delivery. Prochaska and DiClemente's work suggests that action-oriented career management interventions will only be effective for students who are prepared for change. Assessment evidence indicates that many students do not experience curriculum-based career management as part of their process of change, and are not purposefully improving their performance and their employability throughout their higher education.

There are opportunities to improve impact assessment. Merton suggests that detached scrutiny of institutional practice may be initially unwelcome. Nonetheless, the benefits of evaluation are clear, and in HEIs an excellent range of data is available from careers service user records, academic assessment and the DLHE survey.

Improving return on investment seems increasingly important as higher education costs are increasingly borne by the student. In enhancing the cost-effectiveness of their work, university careers specialists might consider:

- Enabling students to construct enlightened personal meanings for 'employability' and examine their individual purpose for, and the function of, their higher education
- Re-examining the outcomes of career management interventions, perhaps using the 'Cost Effective Career Development' spreadsheet and user guide available from http://www.rdg.ac.uk/ccms/events/Parallel_day1.php to separate the impacts of self-directed and curriculum-based career management
- Using cost-effectiveness data to influence the design of curriculum-based career management interventions, for example by demonstrating the impact of credit-rated assessment and student performance management systems such as Performance Development Planning and personal tutoring
- Accommodating students' 'readiness to change' in the development of institutional career management practice
- Measuring the impact on graduates' employability of participation in the broader university experience
- Managing increasing demand for on-programme career management by establishing their role as building institutional career management capability, rather than responding to service-delivery requests.

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Career Studies: New Ideas for Academics and Careers Advisers

Phil McCash

Career education is now part of the curriculum in the UK's educational system from at least Key Stage Three to postgraduate level. This flowering of career education means that it is now a subject of study in its own right in all types of educational institution. Unlike well-established subjects such as Maths or English, however, career education is still relatively under-theorised as a subject in the curriculum. In the UK at least, it is only over the last 35 to 40 years that it has begun to be conceptualised in this way. Consequently, its development as a subject has not yet been comprehensively documented, and much of this work remains to be accomplished.

The conceptualisation of career education as a subject from the early 1970s to the present day

In this section, some significant contributions in the conceptualisation of career education as a subject since the early 1970s are highlighted. This by no means definitive treatment concludes with a summary of main points.

The now disbanded Schools Council (1971) proposed, in a report broadly supportive of career education, that the educational aims of institutions must not be made subservient to the needs of the economy, and that schools must maintain an independent stance so that students can critically study all aspects of society, including work. Lindqvist (1982, p.322), writing from the perspective of cultural history, has argued that because the world of work can be subject to misrepresentation, individuals need to 'dig' where they stand in order to research their own careers and uncover the hidden links between work and society. In addition, Bates (1984, p.215) has suggested that incorporating work into the curriculum entails it becoming 'subject not object'; and argued for a new curriculum in which students can undertake critical enquiry into the historical development of work, its structures, products and requirements. These approaches have served to highlight the importance of independent and critical thinking in career education, and the need to study both past and present in order to gain a contextualised understanding of work and career.

In the mid-1990s, Law (1996, p.65) proposed that career development could be taught via a process of 'career learning'. Despite expressing some ambivalence about the place of career education as a curriculum subject, he suggested that by engaging in career learning, students could become 'their own career-development theoreticians'. In related vein, Holland (1997, p.176) has argued that every person develops a personal career theory (this can be simple or complex) and that the *personal* nature of such theorising means it is located in 'constructivist outer space'. He has suggested that the role of career interventions is to help a person implement or revise their personal theory by comparing it with the Holland theory of career types. The perspectives of both Law and Holland emphasise the beliefs and values of the student, and, in career educational terms, open up the possibility of the student comparing and contrasting such beliefs and values with those of more established thinkers.

Edwards (1997), writing from the perspective of discourse analysis, has criticised forms of career education in which students are encouraged to engage in ever greater levels of self-monitoring and self-governance. This, it is suggested, constitutes a form of oppressive 'responsibilisation' whereby individuals are made to align their identity projects with governmental goals (Edwards, 1997, p.165). Instead he has argued for educational interventions that enable the creative reconstruction of multiple and ambivalent identities via self-reflexive biographies. This approach has highlighted the need for career education in which the self-in-context can be understood and interpreted in creative and complex ways.

Young and Valach (2000) have reconceptualised careers work by combining theory and action within an action-theoretical perspective. This has provided one basis for the merging of career theories and theories of intervention, and represents an important transition from some commonly held distinctions between theory and practice (Herr, 1996; Law, 1996; Watts *et al*., 1996). In terms of career education, this perspective has enabled the breaking down of the division between career development theory and models of career education delivery.

Harris (1999) and Mignot (2001a) have argued for increased recognition of the contested and political nature of careers work. In a related development, a number of commentators have suggested that the dominant discourse of employability should be connected with other academic disciplines and a wider knowledge base (Atkins, 1999; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Payne, 1999; Watts, 2006; Yorke, 2004). These views have highlighted the need for broader and more complex conceptions of career education and linking this with a wider range of disciplines.

Bringing this overview up-to-date, Hodkinson *et al.* (2006, p.44) have argued for the abandonment of 'folk theory' i.e. traditional career educational approaches. Similarly, the current author has suggested moving beyond traditional models of delivery. He has proposed breaking open career education so that students can study career directly, and identified a new role for students as career researchers of their own lives (McCash, 2006).

At the Centre for Career Management Skills Conference in January 2007, Pauline Kneale stated that 'researching a career opportunity is as good a way of practising research skills as any other research activity', provided students are equipped with 'real learning packages', 'real content' and 'appropriately demanding assessments'. Another conference speaker, Ros Foskett, demonstrated the growth of career education as a subject via a recent career education mapping project. The results show that, in the academic year 2004/5, career theory featured as part of the career module *content* at 22 higher education institutions (Foskett et al., 2006, pp.87-88).

In summary, the perspectives briefly described above suggest that to conceptualise career education as a subject of study involves the following aspects:

1. Developing the intellectual and moral freedom to study all facets of career including definitions, concepts, cognitive and affective dimensions.
2. Emphasising the role of individuals as career researchers engaged in a dialogue between both academic and lay career theories, beliefs and histories.
3. Designing high quality course content and assessments that engender critical, evaluative and creative abilities.
4. Recognising that the study of career is an interdisciplinary field drawing from a range of relevant disciplines.

In order to reflect this particular conceptualisation of career education, and to avoid over-use of the cumbersome formulation 'career-education-as-a-subject', the current author will henceforth use the term Career Studies for this phrase (as a singular noun). The four dimensions of Career Studies outlined above will be used in the next section to analyse three models of career education.

Three career education models

Three commonly used career education models will now be examined: Windmills, DOTS and the VT scheme of work. Naturally, this is a somewhat reductive process and the examples chosen are in reality more complex than can be shown here. Nevertheless it will serve to amplify some of the tensions that exist between these models and a Career Studies approach.

1. The Windmills model of career education

The Windmills model is available in both book and web-based formats (Hawkins, 1999; Hawkins, 2001). In the model, seven tactics for career success are identified: focusing skills; finding your ideal job; revealing the secret jobs market; selling yourself; action thinking; boosting career; and measuring career management performance (Hawkins, 2001). In order to identify career issues, readers are invited to identify themselves as: toppled tortoises, crotchety camels, happy hippos, oblivious ostriches, busy bees or lost sheep (Hawkins, 2001). It is boldly stated that 'you need to be extremely self-reliant' and 'we are all a business of one – me plc' (Hawkins, 1999, p.73). Participants are exhorted to follow ten top morale-boosting tips such as:

> **Create positive pictures of your world and the part you play in it. Avoid negative or cynical imagery…. Hang out with positive people…and avoid negative people – they only drag you down to their level.**
> **(Hawkins, 1999, pp.44-45)**

An extensive reading list is included at the end of the book version. The influence of these publications can be detected in the main body of the text. For instance, the seven tactics for career success are based on the 12 self-reliance skills that were in turn drawn from a survey of graduates conducted by Whiteway Research (Hawkins and Winter, 1995, pp.18-19). The language of seven tactics is related to the language of seven habits (Covey, 2004), and the importance of seeing oneself as a company is foregrounded in Bridges (1997). The text concludes with the following statement:

> **There is one vital thing this book should have done for you – it should have given you confidence.**
> **(Hawkins, 1999, p.80)**

Despite its apparent popularity and superficial accessibility, there are a number of difficulties with this model of career education. The first is the absence of theoretical transparency. Aside from the further reading list, the author's theoretical position is not made explicit in the text. So, although one might speculate as to the author's theoretical stance if one is familiar with the wider reading, the non-specialist reader simply encounters statements in the text as a series of unsubstantiated self-assertions. The language used is simplistic, and the author's judgement is unquestioned and absolute. Bill Law has used the phrase 'God's own truth' to describe what one's stereotypical or habit-formed career beliefs can feel like (Law, 2006, p.22) and there is a flavour of God's own truth about the statements used in Windmills. This sits uneasily alongside the language of empowerment and self-reliance that is also a feature of the model.

As shown in the preceding section, Edwards (1997) has criticised the process of responsibilisation whereby individuals are encouraged to become entrepreneurs-of-the-self. On this basis, it could be argued that the Windmills model, and similar approaches, serve to exploit and pathologise vulnerable readers by emphasising self-reliance and self-esteem whilst neglecting contextualisng social explanations. This approach is also in conflict with the high value placed by many careers workers on client-centred and emancipatory practices.

A further problem within the Windmills model seems to be the presence of unacknowledged or unconscious theoretical influences. For instance, the high importance accorded to self-reliance skills calls to mind the human capital theory of labour market economics but the advantages and disadvantages of this theory are not mentioned. Similarly, the personal or social issues that adopting a 'me plc' approach might entail are left unexplored.

2. The DOTS model of career education

In this model, four learning objectives are identified: self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision learning and transition learning. These learning objectives are drawn from a range of career theories including Roberts' opportunity structure and Turner's social mobility theories (Law and Watts, 1977). In this sense, and in contrast to Windmills, the theoretical origins of the DOTS model are made explicit by the authors. A set of theories or beliefs about careers is explicitly applied to a series of learning outcomes. In this sense, DOTS represents a more advanced form of career education than the Windmills model. For some career educators, an advantage of this applied approach is that there is an increase in conceptual transparency. It is a matter for debate as to how widely this knowledge is shared amongst career educators (and their students), but it is certainly present in one of the most thorough and advanced elaborations of the DOTS model, the recent *Career Education Benchmarking Statement*[1].

The disadvantages of the DOTS model have been extensively discussed elsewhere (Law, 1999; McCash, 2006). In terms of this paper, a key point is that individual scope for constructing alternative concepts and models is circumscribed. For example, the model is of limited value to those who: disagree with the order of the four learning outcomes; or believe that alternative learning outcomes are important; or disagree with any of the underpinning theories. For such people, the learning outcomes will be experienced as non-negotiable skill sets and this returns us, in a sense, to the language of God's own truth. Further, the model is restrictive because it is not possible for individuals to develop their own career beliefs and thereby construct their own models of career action within it. This is because the DOTS learning outcomes are designed to encourage matching (of self and opportunity), and so are inappropriate for students who argue for alternative approaches to career development.

A related difficulty, mentioned above in connection with the Windmills model, is the presence of unacknowledged theoretical influences. For instance, within DOTS, the emphasis on the individual and related absence of wider social explanations suggests the influence of human capital thinking in the construction of the model. Similarly, it has been suggested that, within the matching elements of DOTS, one can detect the influence of scientific management and social Darwinist approaches (McCash, 2006). The rather wider conception of Career Studies outlined above might allow some of these issues to be explored, but this is not possible within the limited range of skills-based DOTS learning outcomes.

3. The VT model of career education

The VT model of career education was developed for the Connexions Service National Unit as a scheme of work for Key Stage Three, Key Stage Four and Post-16 (VT Careers Management, 2003). It consists of 17 units each addressing specific question such as: 'What am I like?' (Unit 2) and 'What is the world of work like?' (Unit 7).

Most of the units can be linked with the traditional DOTS learning outcomes. For instance, two of the post-16 units are focused on decision-making and researching opportunities (Units 16 and 17) and can therefore be related to decision learning and opportunity awareness. Elsewhere, the influence of the career learning approach can be detected in the emphasis on sensing and focusing in Units 5 and 7 (Law, 1996). Arguably, human capital theory underpins Unit 15 but is not directly stated.

Within some units, and in marked contrast to the DOTS and Windmills models, students are invited to take a more advanced approach to engaging with career education. For instance, in Unit 13 students employ a personal model of career development. The degree of personalisation possible is left relatively unarticulated, but it is at least suggested that students can identify the factors that are important to them within a model. In Unit 14, students engage with career theory directly through understanding ideas such as self-concept and opportunity structure, and engaging in debates over the future of work and the meaning of employability. In Unit 1, the innovative use of labour market intelligence is suggested in a lesson plan for Key Stage Three pupils where the career beliefs of young people from the 1950s are compared with those from the present day.

[1] Within the Benchmarking Statement, the possibility of exploring the work of Roberts and Super via the DOTS learning outcomes is indicated (Stanbury, 2006, pp.15-16). There is, however, no getting away from the difficulty that DOTS is a matching model (McCash, 2006).

The VT scheme of work represents a more complex approach than that used in the two earlier models. Indeed, this school and college-based model should give higher education-based career educators some pause for thought. In a number of higher education institutions, career education is taught *in the curriculum* without any known theoretical content (Foskett *et al.*, p.45, 2006). In this respect, the VT model, designed for school and college-based students, represents a higher level of teaching and learning.

In summary, the Windmills and DOTS models do not provide a basis for a Career Studies approach to career education. In contrast, the VT model enables students to explore career development in depth by engaging in wider research and constructing their own career models. This is indeed closer to the Career Studies concept. One problem with the VT model, however, is that despite the innovations mentioned, many of the units are essentially based on the DOTS model. This suggests that a more distinct version of a Career Studies approach may be required. An example of this is provided in the next section.

A Career Studies case study

This case study is drawn from the author's own practice as a former lecturer at a higher education institution (HEI) in the east of England. Some contextualising information is first presented, and then an individual case history is provided in more depth.

At the HEI, all students were able to choose a 15-credit career development module as part of their undergraduate degree course. The module learning outcomes were concerned with understanding different dimensions of career development (societal, labour market and individual). Students encountered a range of approaches to career development both through lectures and undertaking wider reading and research which included undertaking an independent field visit. One of the assignments – the vocational study - involved studying a vocational role and using career concepts to interpret that role. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the different concepts used in the assignment by one group of students.

Table 1 shows that individual students varied as to the number of concepts applied, some using only three, others employing up to six. Some approaches were favoured over others, with person-environment fit, cultural and life-stage approaches, proving particularly favoured.

In order to illustrate the case study further, more detail is now supplied with regard to one student: Emma (name changed to protect anonymity).

Table 1: Summary of Career Concepts Used by Students

	Person-fit	Cultural	Life stage	Gender	Class	Race	Other
Claire		■	■	■			
Emma	■	■	■	■	■		■
Caroline	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Amanda	■		■				■
Anthony	■	■		■			
Julie	■	■	■				
David	■	■		■			
Caitlin	■	■	■		■		

Emma was a white, middle-class, female student in her mid-twenties. Growing up in a rural part of eastern England, she had achieved B grades in 3 A-levels, but, unlike many of her contemporaries, decided not to go to university at 18. She spent the years 18-25 working in a hard, physical rural job, and her spare time was devoted to horse-riding. Emma enjoyed both these activities, but at age 25, she had a riding accident and severely injured her back. This meant that she could no longer pursue her usual job or leisure interests, and she decided to enrol on a degree programme. As part of her degree course, she chose the career development module. In undertaking the vocational study, she elected to study her previous job and proposed a 'health-based' theory of career development. She undertook wider research to support her position, linking it to wider perspectives on the role of disability and career. In addition, she demonstrated understanding of competing explanations and theories of career development. Her work demonstrated understanding and conceptualisation of a high standard, and evidence of some original thought.

When interviewed after completing the module, Emma said that she had found it to be one of the most interesting and valuable modules in her degree course. It had provided her with an opportunity to conceptualise and understand her situation and the work roles she had encountered. This, she said, had enabled her to move on by helping her to make sense of her past. In terms of the future, she was now researching other career options, where her back injury would be less significant as a career factor, such as a marketing role in the animal feed industry.

In summary, the case study demonstrates one approach to Career Studies. There is a particular focus on vocational role and the interpretation of it using career concepts. This approach was believed to be appropriate to the needs of the students because it enabled them to make deeper connections between the knowledge and understanding gained in their wider degree course study, particularly with regard to cultural explanations. Emma's story reveals that, for some individuals, cultivating a deeper understanding of the past and present can provide a key to unlocking the future.

Implications of a Career Studies approach

In this section, some further implications of adopting a Career Studies approach are outlined. The following areas are covered: alternative approaches and learning outcomes; teaching and the availability of relevant literature; the role of career researcher; and final remarks.

Alternative approaches and learning outcomes
It is worth stressing that the case study shown above demonstrates only one example of Career Studies. As a consequence of the literature review above, there can be no one-size-fits-all approach to learning outcomes and assessment. It remains a challenge to develop Career Studies for different disciplines, and indeed for different ages and ability groups.

In contrast to the case study shown above, alternative forms of Career Studies may have a greater focus on creative expression, biographical understanding, or subject-specific frames of reference. Some examples drawn from within higher education include: using narrative approaches with undergraduates (Alterio, 2003) and graduates (Gothard, 1999); relating history to career studies (van Eeden, 1998); and understanding social life and employment practices via theological and religious studies (Pattison, 2005). Outside higher education, visual methods have been successfully employed with groups of young people (Cohen, 1984; Mignot, 2001b).

Career Studies suggests a wider curriculum than can be covered in three or four skills-based learning outcomes. In this sense, it is a mysterious subject. This rather portentous-sounding phrase simply meaning it is a puzzle that cannot be solved. In this respect, it is like any other academic field in permitting a wide range of theoretical divergence and epistemological variation. This is perhaps more important within the career education field than outside it. In other academic circles, a certain amount of tolerance is accepted when defining a broad subject area (see the subject benchmarking statements (Quality Assurance Agency, 2003)). Within the career education field, however, there is great and understandable attachment to the certainties of models such as DOTS, and concerns that, without this protective 'theory', arguments for a presence in the curriculum would be weakened. In fact, the reverse is the case; traditional career education models may struggle to gain further credence because of their closed and uninquisitive nature. Arguably, the Career Studies approach attracts enthusiasts because it admits of many competing explanations and approaches. In this respect, it represents a significant maturation of the discipline

The role of career educators and the availability of relevant literature
To teach Career Studies effectively will entail professional development on the part of career educators. This, it has been suggested, will extend to: knowledge of pedagogic theory; research and evaluation methods; and an expanded knowledge of career development theory (Collin, 1998; McChesney, 1995). The reflexive understanding of the career educator's career will also need to be part of this expanded knowledge base.

For the general student, it is perhaps a little unfortunate that the biggest source of careers literature available is the extensive range of popular career guides on display in the self-help sections of high street bookstores. This highlights an important literature gap for textbooks, readers, journals and advanced works that are suitable for the general student of career.

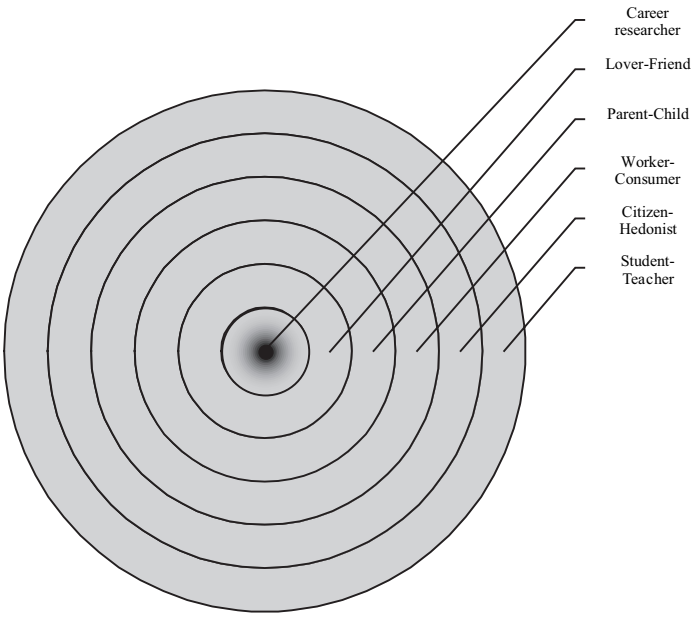
The role of career researcher
One further aspect of Career Studies is increasing in practical significance as students engage in longer and more substantial periods of formal learning. Within higher education, some students study a module over a term/semester, and others over an entire academic year or threaded throughout a degree course. A few undertake a career-related subject as part of a third-year dissertation. In so doing, students study career whilst their own careers are unfolding. In short, studying career becomes part of their career.

This is important because, in a way that is less immediately obvious in one-to-one career counselling and highly instrumental educational interventions, Career Studies involves developing the role of career researcher in addition to the other roles in one's life such as worker, student or citizen (Covey, 2004; Goffman, 1991; Super, 1981). This entails a recalibration of traditional careers work. Career education is often conceived as involving a preparation for entry to other roles, particularly the role of worker. This partly explains why the boundary between deciding about career and being an efficient worker can become blurred. In contrast, Career Studies is distinctively concerned with developing the role of career researcher directly, not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself.

In a wider sense, this is something that is already familiar within other disciplines. At the Centre for Career Management Skills Conference, Tony Watts has alluded to Becher's work on academic cultures in this respect (Becher, 1989). Through studying academic subjects, it is suggested, one becomes disciplined into a certain way of looking at the world and a certain way of being. Within

Career Studies, this involves developing the meaning and sense making parts of oneself. The role of career researcher is the part that makes sense of other roles and enables meaningful connections to be constructed between them (figure 1). It is therefore located at the centre of one's existence as the role that allocates and reallocates relative importance and meaning to other roles as one journeys through life. Following Jung (1969), it can be argued that this role relates to the work of individuation, and may extend to overall life purposes and meanings.

Figure 1: Career Researcher and Relations to Other Career Roles



Conclusion

The evolution of Career Studies since the 1970s has been charted, and a number of its characteristics have been described. It has been suggested that the subject involves direct engagement with a knowledge base of career beliefs, values, concepts and experiences. It further entails the study of academic career theories and beliefs alongside lay theories and actions. These studies result in new constructions and meanings - a move away from 'God's own truth' to 'my own truth'.

It has been stressed throughout this paper that there are many ways of developing a Career Studies curriculum, and it is hoped that this conceptualisation of career education may assist academics and careers advisers in the design of such courses in the future.

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Prioritising Learner Development in Careers Education: A Model for Higher Education

Julia Horn

2006 saw the publication of four important pieces of work about careers education which form the backdrop to this article.[1] First, the Careers Education Benchmark Statement sets out an account of careers education which uses the QAA subject benchmarks as an external reference point, and states that it 'encompasses the diversity of methods in the sector and reflects commonly accepted standards of good practice' (AGCAS, 2006, p.1). Second, Tony Watts' publication Career Development Learning and Employability offers an overview which aims to raise the status of careers education and integrate it with employability initiatives (Watts, 2006). Third, Foskett and Johnston's (2006) report *Curriculum Development and Career Decision-Making in Higher Education: credit bearing careers education* provides an account of current careers education practice across the higher education sector as reported by institutions. All three documents offer descriptions of current practice and the ideas which underpin the development of careers education. By contrast, the fourth and final publication by Phil McCash (2006) critiques the DOTS model which the Benchmark Statement, Watts, and Foskett and Johnston all identify as a key model of careers education. McCash (2006, p.440) instead proposes a form of careers education based on the notion of students as 'career researchers'.

Whether DOTS should be the model for careers education is not the only issue which arises in and between these publications. Other questions include: Is careers education a form of skills training, of academic study, or a hybrid? What role should a careers service have in a higher education institution? How can we define the aims and outcomes of careers education? Watts (2006, pp.6-7) outlines three definitions used to conceptualise the aims of employability – immediate employment, immediate employability, or sustainable employability – arguing that 'attention to career development in definitions of sustainable employability has not always been as strong as it might have been' (ibid, p. 3). McCash's formulation of students as 'career researchers' of their own lives (2006, p. 439) would match best with the concept of careers education for sustainable employability, while the formulation of careers education in the Benchmark Statement avoids differentiating between immediate employment or long-term employability outcomes by stating: 'a key aim of careers education in higher education is to prepare students for graduate level employment and study' (AGCAS, 2006, p.2).

However, none of these authors writes from the perspective I want to investigate here: whether the aims and outcomes of careers education can – and should – be conceptualised from the perspective of higher education, rather than as an extension of secondary school work or career guidance work. This is a viewpoint I want to investigate principally because it is my own, my career having started in teaching in higher education rather than in a careers guidance role. It is also perhaps the perspective of many of those academics whom we might wish to involve in careers education. I would suggest that for many such academics, careers education is likely to be conceptualised as a new branch or extension of the higher education curriculum, rather than as a new application or extension of careers guidance work.

Careers education in higher education

Careers education is different from the academic disciplines of higher education. It is not newness that makes it unusual: there are new subject areas emerging all the time. For example, Media Studies, Surf Science and Childhood Studies are or have recently been 'new' degree disciplines. However, unlike degree disciplines, careers education as commonly practised has not emerged from a new research area, and is not generally taught by specialists who are actively involved in the construction of new knowledge in the area. There is a theoretical and research base for careers education, but it is disconnected from careers educators and emerges elsewhere: principally from independent researchers or lecturers in careers who teach on the vocational postgraduate diplomas in careers guidance. Furthermore, the theoretical model on which most careers education programmes depend is DOTS, which was initially developed for secondary education.

[1] This article uses the term careers education to broadly encompass the practices which come under the headings career or careers education, career management skills, or most recently, career development learning.

Foskett and Johnston report that DOTS underpins about half of the programmes reported to them and that 'the data seem to suggest a greater underpinning of practice by frameworks such as the DOTS model than by learning theories' (Foskett and Johnston, 2006, p.45). Unlike most academic disciplines, which originate in the universities and then may filter downwards towards school education (e.g. psychology, media studies), careers education is an upgrade, a secondary school subject aiming to get to university.

What might it mean, therefore, to formulate careers education specifically for higher education? Can we develop courses which respond to the specific needs of all the following: the educational practices of higher education; evolving concepts of career and theoretical models of career development; and the changing environment of the graduate employment market?

My response to these questions is to propose a model of careers education which does not close down either the content or the theoretical basis of careers education. Rather than settling the debate over DOTS, I would like to consider a model which would allow both DOTS and other models of careers education to develop. My model is based upon three premises:

- Careers education in higher education should be derived from an understanding of the broad aims of the higher education curriculum.
- Careers educators should not be limited in their choice of theoretical model or curriculum content for careers education: variety, experimentation and innovation should be encouraged.
- We should, however, prioritise the *education* in careers education. What can we *teach* and what can students *learn*? Can the curriculum offer a different experience from careers guidance, one which enriches the types of encounters that students have with 'career'?

Learner development in higher education

Careers educationalists sometimes express concerns that the personal and individual nature of career planning makes it irreconcilable with 'academic' courses, and therefore it must be conceptualised and taught in a way which sets it apart from the traditional academic curriculum, as part of the vocational or skills-based outcomes of education. However, I would argue that the underlying concern behind these claims fails to take into account the impact of academic study and the university experience when considered overall, rather than atomised into individual modules or learning outcomes. Positing academic study as devoid of a life-relevant context is a conception of the academic curriculum as a process which delivers knowledge independent of judgement and personal engagement. This is as reductive as imagining careers services to be about no more than telling students how to put together a good CV. While it might be possible to find evidence of such practices for both cases, no one would claim that this is the overall purpose of either academic study or careers guidance.

The development of the individual student in higher education has been a subject of research since the 1960s, and it is this model of development which I want to propose as a way to conceptualise careers education for higher education. The field was established by William Perry (1970), whose grounded research project followed a group of middle-class male students through their time at college in order to develop a model of what he called 'intellectual and ethical development'. Perry was concerned to find out not what knowledge the students were gaining, but rather how individuals came to know, what theories they had about knowledge and how these theories influenced their approach to gaining knowledge and to thinking and reasoning. In short, he sought to find out from the students the following information: how can you know what you know; and what relationship do you have to information, authority, judgement and decision making[2]?

Perry created a nine-stage model of student development, but the scheme I relate to careers education here is a simplified one that has emerged from subsequent research. In an article summarising the approaches and findings of several research projects, Hofer and Pintrich (1997, p.92) proposed a version with four stages rather than nine. This model has also been used by Jenny Moon (2005) in her recent work on critical thinking in higher education[3]. The model is laid out in brief below in my own words. For each of the four 'positions' in the scheme, I have added a section to suggest how a student in this position might conceptualise their career and their career planning needs.

Position 1 Dualism

- Individual is reliant on authority. Authority figures own the truth and can share it. Expertise is unchallenged.
- Learning is focused on information and facts.

Imaginary student
'I went to Careers but they wouldn't tell me what to do.'
'Why won't the careers adviser tell me what job to do with my degree?'

2 A large-scale research project into this field is currently under way, led by the Open University and funded by the ESRC. *The Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning* (SOMUL) asks 'what is learned at university' and considers learning and intellectual development; academic and disciplinary cultures; and the social experience of student culture (Brennan and Jary, 2005).

3 Moon's work also includes an excellent summary of this strand of research (2005, pp.8-9).

Position 2 Multiplicity

- Individual is reliant on authority. Authority figures own the truth and can share it. Expertise is unchallenged.
- Learning is focused on information and facts.
- Information is right or wrong, and uncertainty is temporary, even if long-term. There may be an increase in self-ownership ('we may never know') but also a sense of the arbitrary ('if you don't know, anything goes').

Imaginary student
'I just need to be told how to write a good CV.'
'I know what I want to do, so I don't need careers education.'

Position 3 Relativism

- The individual makes a transition from a world in which there are right/wrong answers in most cases, to a world in which knowledge is essentially relative and context-bound, with a few exceptions.
- Experts are an authority, not in authority.

Imaginary student
'I have to take responsibility for choices in relation to my future.'
'Even though I have ideas about what I want to do, I need to explore them carefully and accept they may not become reality.'

Position 4 Contextual Relativism

- Individual is aware of their responsibility for constructing meaning. Choices are made in face of genuine doubt and legitimate alternatives.

Imaginary student
I have to constantly re-evaluate my life and what I want from work. Nothing is fixed.'
'I have to make choices and I may regret them, but the choices form part of who I become. I must confront and cope with uncertainty.'

Key concepts of the developmental model

We might identify some key features of the way in which I have related this scheme of learner development to careers education and career planning. Perry and subsequent researchers have found few individuals who reach position four in this scheme during their undergraduate years. It is also the case that few students arrive at university in the first position of the scheme. Rather, it is the shift between positions two and three (multiplicity to relativism) which is crucial for learner development in higher education. This is a shift from receiving knowledge from authorities, to participating in the construction of meaning: a construction in which authorities are consulted, rather than obeyed. In practical terms, it is also a move from expecting others to help you to do something, to taking responsibility for action, learning and knowledge.

Degree programmes in higher education often mimic this movement, leading from relatively guided study in the first year, towards individual projects and specialisation in the final year. Underlying this programme of increasingly individualised learning is the aim of increasing student autonomy in understanding the different underlying theories and concepts of their discipline. Students are encouraged through higher education to move from a position of learning from the authorities, to seeing the same authorities as resources which are open to challenge.

Research into the concept of learner development has also made important links between the academic curriculum and activities in the rest of an individual's life. For example, Marcia Baxter Magolda (1994) observed that both postgraduate education and work can draw young adults towards contextual conceptions of knowledge (e.g. positions three and four) because in her research they 'held participants responsible for making their own decisions, required direct experience in making decisions and involved interactions with peers or co-workers to explore and evaluate opinions' (ibid, p.34). As such, experiences outside the curriculum (e.g. work experience) may help a student to develop their understanding of conceptions of knowledge and knowing within the academic discipline. The challenge for careers education is to use these same conceptions within the academic curriculum to inform and engage students' perceptions of their 'career' after university. If authorities in the field of careers education are careers advisers, employers, and researchers of career and employment, then we should be aiming to encourage students to perceive each of these parties as 'an' authority, not 'in' authority.

What does this mean for careers education?

> **The classroom should feel as if it is a place where risk-taking is tolerated. It is a place for the exploration of ideas, rather than the simple transmission of knowledge, it is a place in which there is time to tease out problems rather than jump to a solution in an absolutist manner.**
> **(Moon, 2005, p.16)**

Some careers educators in higher education will find little to disagree with here; they already encourage students to reflect upon concepts of career and career planning, and to engage with different approaches and resources. I would argue, however, that this scheme does present some challenges to careers education, three of which I outline below.

A careers education course is a quick and easy way to sort out your career (or the careers of your students)…
This scheme of developmental learning for students challenges any form of careers education which is based on an authority (e.g. teacher, employer) telling the student 'how to' plan their career (as opposed to 'how to' write a CV, which of course is based on a set of conventions and as such is better suited to this form of teaching). Such a model of education would oblige the student to remain in position two of the developmental scheme, rather than encouraging students to adopt a more independent, reflective position. While various authorities (careers advisers, teachers, employers) may come into a course of careers education to put their point of view, the overall course should allow the student to compare and contrast these different approaches in order to reach their own decision about the value of each. It is tempting to offer courses which look as though they will solve this 'problem' of career quickly; but, like a self-help manual, they bear little relationship to the difficult and complex nature of 'career', or to the philosophy of higher education with its focus on enquiry and critical thinking.

In consequence, models such as DOTS cannot 'be' careers education, although this model could certainly be one approach which students encounter. If DOTS is used as the basis for a course of careers education, students should be given the opportunity to consider criticisms of and, if possible, alternatives to this model.

Careers education will improve institutional employment figures…
A developmental scheme of student learning also poses a challenge to careers education conceptualised as a way to get students to make a 'career decision' or to increase the numbers of students getting graduate jobs within a certain timeframe. Although these may be outcomes of a well-run course, they cannot and should not be conceived as a predictable outcome of an educative process. Otherwise, this 'education' would be a form of manipulation of both student and academic freedom. Indeed, this is a problem with which careers advisers are very familiar from their guidance activities, and careers services are expert in balancing institutional or governmental demands for employment outcomes with client needs for unbiased and personalised guidance. As such, careers education should aim to improve student understanding and knowledge – an improvement which may, in turn, increase employment outcomes, but which may equally lead to better-informed uncertainty about one's future, or indeed to well-informed decisions to postpone entry into the labour market.

Careers education will help you (or your students) make a career decision, and will sort you (or your students) out with a good CV as well…
Some careers education programmes are currently more suited to students who are career-decided – or to those students who are strategic enough to realise that picking a well-defined profession (teaching, for example) will make their coursework easy to complete. Such assignments aim to give students an opportunity to practise a real-life exercise – but may also encourage students to shy away from investigating professions which are not well-defined or easy to get information on.

This is a difficult challenge for careers education courses, but one which must be acknowledged. Realistic assignments may also be assignments which students can and do complete without reflection. Assignments which require critical engagement and which are difficult to tackle may not resemble the graduate recruitment process. Furthermore, students should be aware that a CV which gets a 2.1 may not even be short-listed by an employer. The criteria of assessment in higher education and employment criteria in the labour market do not, and cannot, be made to match. While higher education usually depends upon criterion-referencing (marks are given for attainment at a level specified – the marking criteria), the labour market works upon competition, and only the top candidate gains a reward, regardless of the achievements of those further down the scale.

Finally, career decision-making is a personal and long-term process, and encouraging students to believe that they need to 'choose' a career is unrealistic in today's employment market. The majority of people move between jobs and professions, and 'construct' a varied career rather than 'choosing' a single occupation. Careers education should help students to be aware of this and to 'manage' rather than choose. Yet many careers education courses do not go beyond instruction in the process of job hunting with a specific focus on graduate recruitment, even though many of today's graduates will get to a graduate job through their day-to-day performance in a non-graduate or graduate-track job rather than as a result of their performance in graduate recruitment rounds. Should careers education take a longer view of their students' futures and aim for career self-management (Watts, 2006, p.12) rather than, or in addition to, job-hunting skills?

Conclusion

Careers education has a unique position in the range of activities in which careers services and academics become involved. Higher education can make a specific contribution to careers education by placing the emphasis on learner development and critical thinking in the context of career. Programmes of careers education can help students to develop complex ideas, to debate, and to research their own concepts of career. These are all activities which go beyond the scope of individual guidance with its emphasis on the personal and with its time constraints (most students only having one or two guidance interviews), but which are equally valuable in preparing students for their lives after university.

However, we do need to reflect upon the types of activity that work best in the classroom, and how students might be expected to develop through a careers education

course. This reflection should not be about which models are the 'best' models of careers education, and may not be about personalised career planning; rather, it may be about how we can develop our students into independent, critical thinkers. If we contrast the individualised, supportive and private environment that a careers guidance interview provides to the group, developmental and public environment of the careers education curriculum, then both can be conceptualised as offering distinctive contributions to the development of students in higher education. That development in turn can be properly understood as both vocational and academic, personal and intellectual, in which careers education can properly become, in the term recently favoured by Watts (2006), 'career development learning'.

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Is it Time to Embed Careers Teaching and Support in the Disciplines?

Pauline Kneale

Employability is a powerful motivator for students seeking to reduce their debt, yet the proportion of university students who pass through the doors of their Careers Service is generally low. 'I will worry about a job when I've got a 2.1' and 'They don't have graduate jobs, why get their advice' are phrases heard all too often and of questionable accuracy. If students do not visit their campus careers offices, then this image is not going to improve. Careers staff are generally not perceived as cool (not that academics are either). So what can be done? At what point will academics in the disciplines be worried enough by graduate destinations to put employability issues on the front burner?

This introduction asks some questions that unhelpfully are not answered directly here. They are designed to raise issues for discussion, and the article that follows takes the same approach. Not all of these questions will be helpful, context is everything, and every higher education institution (HEI) is in a different position. But, for example: What are the triggers for making curriculum space for employability and enterprise matters? Is the curriculum the right place for employability-motivated student learning? What would a Careers Service have to offer in teaching to match the level of academic-led skills teaching? What might a research-led careers assessment consist of?

Essentially these points raise issues about cultural change in an organisation. To achieve an effective and successful employability and careers operation, change needs to be supported. Hultman (1998, p.5) lists eight reasons why people will support organisational change, all of which can be thought about in the context of careers operations:

1. *They believe their needs are not being met at present.* How would academics know if a student felt unsupported in the development of career-related skills or preparation for work? What is the evidence being collected? What is relevant evidence? How strong does evidence have to be to make curriculum space for new developments?
2. *They believe the change will make it easier for them to meet their needs.*
3. *They believe the benefits outweigh the risks.* What are the risks involved in making space for careers work?
4. *They believe change is necessary to avoid or escape a harmful situation.* What is the worst that can happen if the current student engagement with careers professionals is maintained?
5. *They believe the change process is being handled properly.* What is the mechanism for developing closer curricular ties with careers materials? Who validates the quality?
6. *They believe the change will work.* What is the persuasive evidence that this is a route worth pursuing? What will influence academic staff? What will influence careers colleagues?
7. *The change is consistent with their values.*
8. *They trust those responsible for the change.*

Background

Work through the 1990s and early 2000s has focused on the role of careers professionals in developing graduates who will move comfortably to the job market and raised the profile of degrees which are career-oriented (Maguire, 2005). Employability has been recognised as a force influencing student decisions when entering HE as well as in student retention. The report of the Harris Committee (2000) identified the strategic role and position of Careers Services. In seeking 'a modern service, which provides high quality provision to meet customers' needs', it is worth reviewing four of the recommendations (Harris 2000, pp.13-15) and asking to what extent the careers operation in one's own institution is meeting these aspirations:

- HE Careers Services should strive to engage the interest, commitment and involvement of senior management within the HEI.
- Careers Service staff should be engaged as consultants, catalysts and, where appropriate, deliverers, in relation to employability issues.
- The Careers Service could effect a more prominent role within the HEI by being centrally involved in the delivery of career planning modules which are run by individual departments.
- HE Careers Services should seek to establish service-level agreements with academic departments with a view to contributing to the development of the curriculum, including elements for enhancing student employability.

These questions focus on the role of careers colleagues, but there are questions in parallel for academics. The status of careers staff within departments varies across universities. It is arguable that careers colleagues need to have a place on faculty and department teaching committees so that both sides are aware of emerging agendas and opportunities. Knowing people personally can help to raise awareness and break down barriers. In some cases, these barriers are not insubstantial. One real concern is to get alignment of values around this agenda so that arguments like 'I didn't use the Careers Centre to get my job, so it's not worth you going', 'it's not my job to work on CVs with the students', and 'they came here for Chemistry/History/French, so that's what I'm doing with them', are heard much less frequently.

An information flow between academics and careers experts around graduate employability, alumni information and evidence of effective student engagement is needed to raise the profile of employability. This means presenting colleagues with convincing researched evidence to counteract theological arguments. Do the Dean and Head of School, for example, know the graduate employability rates for their students? Does the average lecturer doing admissions work have these facts? Who does need to know, who are the gate-keepers or influencers to work with, and how are these busy people to be kept up to speed in a dynamic market?

The 'customer' here is not necessarily helping the process. Lack of student engagement with and appreciation of employability learning opportunities can be an obstacle. This is never going to be a cool activity and graduation can seem too far away: 'I will worry about a job when I've got a 2.1'. We must recognise that students have many competing demands - vacation and term-time work, social and sporting activity. 'I have to have my job in term time to keep the loans below £6,000; there isn't time' is fair comment. It also brings to the fore a point that many students make: 'I have a job in term time, and in vacations. I have been successful in getting jobs in the past. I have a CV that has got me a job. So why do I need to think about the next stage now?' There is a real issue about pitching employability materials and activities in such a way that the student feels engaged without being patronised. Targeting level 1 students about jobs four years down the line is inappropriate.

It is worth reviewing with careers staff, academics and students what they see as working effectively towards this agenda as well as what is hindering it. Here are some suggestions as to what does and does not work.

What does work

- Careers staff working with academics with shared goals and both sides listening and responding to what students want. Academics understanding what careers advisers do and displaying a positive attitude towards their work. Careers advisers drip-feeding information to academics and involving them in classroom sessions/workshops.
- A prompt service with support available when students need it most and guidance that is well-targeted and effectively delivered. Getting the basics right in terms of providing decent maps of how to find the Careers Centre and a user-friendly website. Students appreciate clear, easy-to-use materials.
- Flexible and realistic delivery of teaching that targets what is relevant to students *now*, and provides simple, immediate answers focused on students' needs. Identification of the stages in career planning from the first-week induction sessions onwards, with workshops targeted to specific needs. First years should focus on getting well-paid term time and vacation jobs and undergraduate internships. In parallel, there needs to be plenty of advertising and information targeted at relevant academic and support staff, with emphasis on relevance. Emailing those who are teaching students that week and the support staff who can put a notice up or email the entire year is useful. Untargetted requests and emails drop into the background clutter, to be ignored by all.
- Maximising discipline relevance through involving academics who possess a genuine interest in students' plans post-graduation, through applied research and through promoting connections to students between their subject and its application in the 'real world'. These might involve research-led module assignments for assessment, for example researching the labour market for their discipline, entrepreneurship amongst graduates of their discipline and in the past, and potential work-placement opportunities that will enhance discipline understanding.
- Support and commitment from senior management. Effective dissemination of management information and co-operation with Student Unions to identify student career needs and to promote careers education. Academic course teams already do much work for students in these areas that is not always recognised, and this needs to be identified and credited. Heads of School, Deans and other senior managers should be invited to regular, well-targeted briefings which tell them something about their student body that they did not already know. These meetings should be so useful that students want to book a date for the next meeting before the careers adviser leaves the room. If that is not the outcome then some review is in order.

What does not work

- One-off events for students at any stage – with no follow-up and no assessment, they fade quickly in people's memories.

- Start-of-year announcements. The request 'Can I have ten minutes at the start of a lecture …?' is fairly traditional but is it effective? At a point when a student is waiting for their first lecture this is worthy but background information. Students are not prepared for it, and unless there is a compulsory follow-up activity and assessment, the message fades.
- Anything where the student is not required to follow up with a piece of personal research. An activity that personalises the information for the individual, and preferably an assessment, is critical to successful engagement.
- Any system where the student must be proactive to start the engagement. One-to-one careers interviews, student-booked, can be very intimidating.
- Leaving it to the final year – it is too late to get on a placement, many application deadlines have passed, and examinations and assessments present too many distractions.
- Giving careers support *before* reassuring students that yes, thinking about the future is uncomfortable. There is a danger in providing too much information at the wrong time and in running generic sessions with a 'one size fits all' approach.

Where are careers and employability activities located on campus? Location is important. It is worth remembering that students go to the library because curricula are cleverly designed to force reading. Careers offices on very well-trodden routes with sunny rooms, friendly people and good caf_ facilities will attract regular visitors who pick up information. If these criteria are not met, then perhaps some thought about improving the attractiveness of information locations would pay dividends. Crucial evidence is the number of student visits and revisits. If 80% of students visit 5 times or more, then everything is probably OK. What are the numbers by School and across an institution?

Of course, much activity takes place online, but students are very web-savvy and sites need to be refreshed in style regularly and be user-friendly. Again, statistics on student visit numbers and time spent online, together with event bookings, are vital evidence of effectiveness. Discussions with student focus groups are useful in raising the effectiveness of web delivery.

The academic, for whom employability is unlikely to be a central interest, but for whom student success is vital, might want to consider to what extent the following statements line up with their own context and practice, and to reflect on what might be done to enhance the current position:

- Without academic intervention and support, the status of employability amongst students is not going to increase.
- Placing students effectively in the graduate workforce is as important an outcome for a university as the number of 2.1s and firsts.
- Methods for integrating engagement must be backed up by positive support from the teaching community. Researching a career opportunity is as good a way of practising research skills as any other research activity, and it can therefore be assessed.
- The assessments for careers or employability activities within modules are as tough as in any other module. All such activities are assessed.
- There is creative use of the employability profile data, for example with entries in every student handbook, on all department websites and in PDPs. This information is used in tutorials and at open days (Higher Education Academy, 2006; AGCAS, 2006).

Places to start looking for UK current practice include employability case studies and institutional employability strategies (AGCAS, 2007), the Higher Education Academy (2007) Employability and Enterprise site, and the Careers Education Benchmark Statement (AGCAS, 2006).

What from the following list might careers colleagues embrace?

- Development of employability and careers learning packages with academically solid content. These may be used in small bites - 2 to 5 credits in each of the 3 years, or in chunks as large as a module.
- Making real links with PDPs at every teaching and discussion session.
- Materials in the style that are familiar to students: for example, with clear learning outcomes for each session, and linked assessments.
- A focus on short-term returns, rather than end-of-degree employment: for example, on work placements, internships and getting employment in the local area for first-year students.
- Being challenging and demanding of students at all times. Work set should be difficult to be treated as a parallel activity to other degree assessments.
- Using alumni at every possible opportunity. Try to ensure students see graduates as close to their own age-group as possible as employment role models: their information is 'more real'.
- Being able to quote every department's graduate employability statistics.
- Finding the opportunity to talk to directors of studies and heads of school, to promote the 'what careers can do for you' agenda.

What might a successful employability and careers operation look like?

Here are a selection of possible ambitions for engagement. What is a relevant challenge in your own university or discipline?

- All students have at least two meaningful engagements with careers each year.
- All students receive CV assistance and interview practice.
- 90% of students move to graduate jobs within three years.
- Every undergraduate student undertakes one piece of career-related research and assessment in the context of their discipline.
- Every level 1 undergraduate is aware of and knows how to research work placement, research placement and internship opportunities appropriate to their discipline and has the ability to create CVs and letters of application tailored to different types of employment of the right standard to be successful if they choose to apply.
- Every level 2 and 3 undergraduate is aware of and knows how to research career opportunities appropriate to their discipline, can create an evidenced curriculum vitae and letter of application, and has had an opportunity to practise interview skills.
- Every postgraduate student has at least one careers tutorial introduction to researching career opportunities, resources and provision. Each taught postgraduate student has had an opportunity to develop CV and interview skills six months before they complete their degree.
- Every research postgraduate student understands that a PhD provides research skills which are sought after by many graduate employers. PhD students undertake a short course in careers research, CV and interview skills as part of research training.

Concluding thoughts

Raising questions is, at one level, very annoying. This article is however offered as a template to aid thinking around practice by both discipline and careers colleagues. The issue of employability is not going to go away. It is hard to make it work but universities cannot afford to ignore it and there has never been a better time to push it to the forefront of practice. It is also a good time to review practice by individuals and by departments. Regular, traditional activities drop into calendars, but are they really effective? What are the numbers of people really influenced by an event? Episodic events are momentarily attractive, but what is their long-term impact?

Cynical academic colleagues are only likely to be persuaded to revise teaching arrangements by hard evidence. This is a good time to have it on hand to drive change. Whether or not it is time to integrate activities which involve students researching employment opportunities in their assessed curricula, it is certainly an opportune time to review practice and to raise students' awareness of their graduate options.

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