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Career Research & Development

The NICEC Journal

making practice thoughtful and theory practical

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Editor

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Guidelines for contributors

Contributions are welcomed and will be subject to anonymous academic and practitioner review. 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 welcomed.

VT Careers Management

Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal is published on behalf of NICEC by VT Careers Management. VT Careers Management is a major provider of career guidance to young people in the south-east as well as a publisher of careers materials and software products.

Aims and scope

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

- Career practitioners working in schools, colleges, connexions partnerships, 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.

Think Tank Issue

Anthony Barnes, Editor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Cultural Capital and Young People's Career Progression Part 2: Making Sense of the Stories

Phil Hodkinson and Martin Bloomer

Introduction

This paper is the second of two, exploring the significance of cultural capital in the career development of young people. In Part 1 we presented the stories of two young people, whom we called Daniel Johnson and Tamsin Rooke. In this paper we examine the use of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as a means of explaining the similarities and differences between their stories. We conclude with a brief discussion of implications for guidance.

Dispositions to learning

As Daniel's and Tamsin's careers developed, each of them made sense of their changing situations through their own developing dispositions towards learning, education, social life, family, career and work. According to Bourdieu, such dispositions make up what he termed a person's habitus, are largely tacitly held, and strongly influence actions in any situation – familiar or novel. The habitus is influenced by who the person is and where in society they are positioned, as well as by their interactions with others, in what Bourdieu terms a field, such as the field of further education and the youth labour market. Habitus is ingrained and fairly stable, but not unchanging:

The habitus is a product of conditionings which tends to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it. It's a kind of transforming machine that leads us to 'reproduce' the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply or mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 87).

Many of the young people in our research changed in their learning and career dispositions or activities over the four-year period of the project, as in Tamsin's case. Such changes were often unpredictable although they could usually be understood with hindsight. Yet often, as with Tamsin, not everything about a person's dispositions altered, and very few, if any, broke free of the patterns of educational and employment progression predicted for the broad social categories of gender and class to which they belonged. For Daniel and Tamsin, identity and habitus were significant forces in the transformation of their learning careers and were themselves partly transformed in that same process. Daniel's commitment to music and Tamsin's to working with children were the cornerstones of their identities for much of the time we knew them. Tamsin's career was marked, initially, by a slow but steady growth in confidence in her own capabilities to the point where she contemplated progression to university. However, the reality of having to provide for herself once her BTEC course had finished, meant that the need for domestic security and the Burger Bar opportunity structures assumed greater importance. Her identity had been further transformed in this process, despite the fact that she maintained some of her aspirations for university. Her identity as a prospective nurse, child carer and social worker was modified as she climbed the Burger Bar career ladder. Daniel's career shifted from a musician who loved being in college to learn, to a musician who did not want to stay in a college focussed upon examination success, to a musician who lived by doing a series of low-skilled jobs. Towards the end of our fieldwork, he was changing again, into someone with a possible catering career, who wanted a family, but still enjoyed his music. So what is cultural capital, and how does this help explain these evolving careers?

Cultural capital

Olneck (2000, p. 319) describes three forms of cultural captial:

First, cultural capital is embodied in styles and manners and in modes of bearing, interaction and expression. It is also embodied in cultural preferences and affinities, in apparently intuitive responses to valued distinctions and institutional expectations, and in ease and facility in valued ways of knowing and reasoning and with valued schemes of appreciation and understanding. Finally, it is embodied in the command of valued cultural knowledge.

Most commonly, cultural capital has been used to distinguish between social groups and the advantages and disadvantages that accrue to them through their possession or lack of possession of it. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that there is a strong relationship between the possession of cultural capital and the capacity to invest it profitably, and success within the educational system. Other researchers, like us, have examined the concept as something possessed and used by individuals (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Ball et al., 2000).

Superficially, the contrasting stories of Daniel and Tamsin are paradoxical, from a cultural capital perspective, for each can be seen as both confirming and contradicting the sorts of explanation emphasised by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) with regard to educational progress. Tamsin's situation at the time our research finished – working in a hamburger bar and increasingly thinking of raising a family rather than going on to university – fits the common female working class trajectory. It could be argued that she lacked much of the cultural capital that would have helped her to go to university and enter even a predominantly female professional career, such as nursing or child care. She had no family experience of educational success to draw upon, and no 'insider knowledge' of the system. In her social networks of family and friends, she would have had to constantly work against cultural norms and expectations if she was to fulfil her university ambitions. From this perspective, she is a typical case of a working class young woman who, despite all her efforts, lacked the cultural capital to break out of the constraints of her daily life. Even had she succeeded in going to university, her low status vocational course would have probably led to a relatively lower status university than the ones that Daniel could have accessed through his A-level courses. In contrast, Daniel's story appears to contradict a simplistic cultural capital argument. He appeared to possess all the cultural and social capital, including prior academic success, needed to obtain high A-level grades, progress to university and get a well paid, professional job. But rather than reproducing the values and career typical of his class background, he transgressed them in his consideration of a vocational course in funeral directing, and in eventually dropping out of college to take-up a low-skilled job.

However, both stories can be read differently. If cultural capital was simplistically deterministic, Tamsin would have dropped out of college when her friends did, or perhaps struggled on and achieved a bare Pass rather than a Merit, and progressed to low status employment with never a serious thought of university. The fact that she did not drop out, that she got better grades than anyone expected and that, at least for a time, she held strong and educationally realistic ambitions to go to university, poses a challenge to simplistic readings of the cultural capital thesis. The alternative reading of Daniel's story, that cultural capital can partly explain what happened to him, is less obvious. But his love of learning and his strong intrinsic motivation links directly to the middle class values of his family, with well educated, inquisitive parents prepared to engage him in discussion, books always in evidence, and intellectual ideas and creativity valued for their own sake. Yet it was these practices and values which contributed to his dropping out of college. Furthermore, when we compare Daniel's interviews with those of Tamsin, there is a sharp contrast. Tamsin was always concerned with practical realities and even her interest in monkeys was justified on these grounds. Her accounts often demonstrated a lack of confidence in educational surroundings, and a worry about the future, even though these were balanced by a strong determination to succeed. Daniel, on the other hand, almost always exuded self-confidence but appeared to lack determination, except with regard to his music and his constant quest for new knowledge and understandings. A plausible explanation for this is that he considered he was following a low-risk strategy: his cultural capital was so strong that he felt able to spend time in low level jobs, confident that he would always have the resources to change his situation if he needed to. By the end, both were economically poor, working in similar jobs, but Daniel was thinking about his music as well as getting a wife, whilst Tamsin's mind was focussed on earning a living and saving for a family. Their situations were culturally different and their cultural capital remained significantly different.

This interesting combination of contradictions and partial paradoxes can be summed up in this way. Tamsin and Daniel arrived at similar career positions in their early 20s, but by contrasting routes, partly because their respective cultural capital resources influenced their educational and career progressions in different ways. In other words, cultural capital is a necessary factor in explaining their learning careers, but it is not sufficient for this purpose, nor was its operation simple. To tease this out further, we need to understand cultural capital as a relational concept, and also examine the implications of using the concept at an individual, rather than group level.

For Bourdieu, cultural capital can only be understood in relation to the field within which it exists. In our cases, the field encompasses the transition from compulsory education in the UK into further education, university, work and/or unemployment. Because of the nature of our research, our spotlight into this field focuses primarily upon the experiences of our sample with regard to their experiences of formal education, but the field also encompasses the transition from adolescence to adulthood, including the achievement of independence from parents, the establishment of a person's own home, and the acquisition of a new partner or family. In one key sense, Daniel's and Tamsin's positions in this field are similar, for they both began as full-time students, living with and largely supported by their parents or grandparent, and both ended up in employment, supporting themselves on low income. In other ways, their positions were different: most obviously in terms of their genders and social class backgrounds. In Bourdieu's terms, they were positioned differently in at least these respects, with differing habituses embracing differing dispositions to learning. In the field in which they were positioned, each interacted with large numbers of others, who were also positioned. Because our research focussed mainly upon the individual cases themselves, we cannot produce an empirically grounded map of these others and their relationships. Nonetheless, the stories that Daniel and Tamsin tell suggest that significant others in the field did include, at the very least, parents, siblings, boy/girl friends, other friends and fellow students, teachers, employers and fellow workers. At times, other relatives may have been involved, and also other professionals, such as careers advisers. Daniel's and Tamsin's stories provide numerous examples of the significance of such interrelationships.

While field influences but does not determine meanings and actions, cultural capital, with its close cousins, symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), gives participants greater or lesser potential to influence a field, or to excel in it. Bourdieu sometimes distinguishes between different forms of capital, but his prime purpose is to argue that capital includes a wide range of potentially valuable attributes. Here, we use the term cultural capital to subsume the others, for we are concerned with the explanatory power of the concept in general, rather than with the identification of specific forms and types of it. Of course, economic capital is also significant. The two often go together, although, as Bourdieu (1998) points out, the balance between them may vary considerably. When our research started, Daniel had much more of both than Tamsin, in relation to the educational field. By the end, their personal economic capital differed little, whilst the differences in cultural capital remained arguably wide, in type as well as proportion. As is the case with regard to positions, the significance of cultural capital is often unrecognised by participants themselves.

As Bourdieu makes clear, cultural capital is relative to the field in question: "the value of a species of capital . . . hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed" (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Indeed, what has value in one field may not do so in another. Okano (1993, 1995) takes this further, arguing that what she prefers to call resources can sometimes be neutral or even negative, in a particular field. Thus, Daniel's very inquisitiveness, fed by his self-confidence, actually hindered his progress towards examination success. Also, differing forms of cultural capital may make it easier to do certain things in the field, but not others. As far as we could determine, Daniel was far better equipped than Tamsin to succeed in the academic game, which is a key part of this field. He was intelligent and articulate, had good examination results at 16-plus, had confidence in his own ability, and was well-read, with articulate parental support. He embarked with relative ease on the high status A-level route. Tamsin, on the other hand, had to work hard to get as far as she did. We have already pointed to the lack of financial security and experience of further education at home, to her modest examination achievements at 16-plus, and to her struggle to succeed in college. However, her capital had arguably greater purchase than Daniel's in her chosen field of child care, where many of those values, skills and attitudes, acquired by working class young women, proved well-suited, fitting the cultural expectations of this part of the field. While she may have lacked cultural capital in some absolute sense, that which she had was of more help in the practical workplace than in the formal classroom. This is one way that cultural capital contributes to social reproduction, for example, as working class young women take up roles for which their capital is useful and valued, confirming both the nature of the field and the place of themselves and their peers within it.

In a contrary way, Daniel's cultural capital had a gap, as far as the traditional academic game was concerned. He lacked the organisational capacity and determination or interest to succeed in the terms defined by external examination requirements. He was more interested in music and in pursuing knowledge for his own purposes, than in handing in assignments, or getting examination grades. The cultural nature of these dispositions is revealed by the temporary influence of his girl friend. Whilst in that relationship, and drawing upon her capital as well as his own, Daniel briefly knuckled down to work, allowing his arse to be kicked, as he put it.

Cultural capital is not only relational to the field: it can also vary over time. As Tamsin's BTEC studies progressed, we can see her capital in the education part of the field increase. We can never know, but it is conceivable that, had she progressed straight to university, she might have had enough capital to succeed in a relatively low status vocational diploma or degree programme. However, her predominantly working class cultural capital probably contributed to her decision not to go immediately. Towards the end of our interviewing process, there were signs that her cultural capital as prospective partner and mother was growing at the expense of her academic capital. It is more difficult to identify changes in cultural capital in Daniel's story. However, it is interesting to speculate on his apparent loss of academic cultural capital when he dropped out, but we suspect it could be rapidly revived if he ever re-embarked upon an academic career with the primacy and determination he gave to his music.

Cultural capital, thought of in these ways, is far removed from the deterministic interpretations sometimes placed upon Bourdieu's work. When we focus more explicitly upon its meaning for individuals, as opposed to groups, this is re-emphasised. If Tamsin were seen as a statistic - a single unit in a large study on class reproduction, for example - there would be little reason to question a deterministic interpretation of the relationship between her position and her achievements. She started and ended in the same place: a female in a working class family, becoming a working class female with a typically low-paid job, and ambitious to form a family. However, as we have seen, once the focus is placed upon her individual case, things look less clear cut. It is helpful to view cultural capital as contributing to her *horizons for action* (Hodkinson, et al., 1996), and to her ability to act within those horizons. A person's horizons for action determine the limits of their activity at any one time. They are made up of the relationship between external opportunity structures and the person's perceptions of those structures and of themselves. They are both external to the person and rooted in their habitus and identity. Cultural capital helps determine these horizons, for example through the ways in which it affects what is perceived as, or is practically possible. The lack of appropriate cultural capital is one of many reasons why Tamsin could not become a nurse. It may also have contributed to the fact that she never considered more 'male careers' as being within her purview. But cultural capital does not only help define horizons for action: its utilisation is one of many factors that contribute to achievement within those horizons. For, like chips in a board game, cultural capital can be deployed to greater or lesser degree, and more or less effectively. Tamsin's cultural capital made it easier for her to succeed in her work placements than in college. Daniel's helped him cope with the intellectual ideas he encountered, but not the discipline of organised study. However, their use of cultural capital was not a predominantly conscious experience.

The cultural capital of a person can only be understood in relation to their unequal and complex positional relations and interactions in the field as a whole. Furthermore, at the individual level, as Tamsin's and Daniel's stories show, two further factors are significant, which are largely invisible in large-scale studies of groups. One is the agency of the person, acting deliberately or unintentionally within their horizons for action and within the field. Cultural capital may have influenced Tamsin's decision to continue with her BTEC course, and Daniel's decision to abandon his A-levels, but these decisions were not forced. In both cases, other options were realistically available, within their horizons for action, and consistent with the cultural capital they possessed. Secondly, happenstance can make a significant impact upon individual lives, and cultural capital should always be understood in relation to this. Happenstance can change horizons, both at the level of opportunity structures, and of a person's perceptions of what is possible and/or desirable, as when Daniel first considered, and later rejected, the course in funeral directing. Cultural capital influences the person's perceptions of and responses to changed circumstances.

Implications for guidance

Daniel's and Tamsin's experiences, and the effects of their respective cultural capital, positions and dispositions, challenges over-simplistic notions of what career guidance can be, and what it can achieve. To put it bluntly, many of the forces and pressures that influence career development are far more pervasive, and powerful, than formal guidance provision can ever be. If we are to develop realistic expectations for guidance provision, and avoid simplistic assumptions that greatly exaggerate its influence, this is an important lesson to learn. Careers are not determined by some simple combination of accurate information, good decision making skills and appropriate guidance. Life is much more complex and difficult than that.

However, just because guidance is not, and cannot be some sort of magic bullet, it does not follow that it cannot be immensely valuable. What it does mean is that its value cannot be guaranteed, and partly depends upon many factors outside the control of guidance providers. Guidance can be effective, when it is closely related to the interests of the client. This is because, as the two stories show, young people like Daniel and Tamsin do exert considerable influence over their own futures. Skilled guidance can help them do this more effectively and knowingly. There are obvious examples in both stories. In Tamsin's case, some skilled guidance, during her final college year, could have ensured that she knew she would be likely to get financial support at university, and could have helped her weigh up the benefits of going immediately, as opposed to having a year off first. In Daniel's case, good guidance might have helped him consider a wider range of jobs and careers when he dropped out of his A-level studies, rather than seeing a funeral directing course or working in a burger bar as the only options. However, we cannot be certain that such guidance would have resulted in different choices, or that different choices would have led to better futures – for either or them. What is more certain, is that such guidance, to be effective, would have had to recognise as legitimate decisions frowned upon by national policy. Thus, it would have been necessary to acknowledge with Daniel that dropping out was a feasible and realistic option, and with Tamsin, that going to university would indeed be difficult, with no guarantees of success.

From this perspective, good guidance should be optimistically realistic, non-judgemental, and geared towards helping young people think slightly more clearly about, and possibly do slightly better, those things which they, not greater society, value. This entails realistic and honest recognition of wider social inequalities, rather than peddling an Anglicised version of the all-American dream. Above all, it means accepting that good guidance may not always make a noticeable or measurable difference. The same, of course, is true for many other social professions – not least, teachers, social workers, and researchers like us.

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Careers Support in the Workplace

Wendy Hirsh

Much of the public policy debate on career advice and guidance focuses - quite rightly - on young people and those facing unemployment or redundancy. Career guidance and advice in these situations often has a heavy emphasis on the acquisition of qualifications and on raising basic skills and personal confidence. It is often delivered by relatively specialised providers with public funding, augmented by those with less specialised training in careers work such as teachers and tutors or community workers.

There is, however, another whole world of career support for adults who are already in employment, and who wish to develop their careers further with their current employers or by moving from one employer to another. Career support for employed adults is fairly rarely supplied by specialists - it is an oddity of employment that your employer is only likely to send you for career guidance when they make you redundant! Career support in the workplace is often less about getting qualifications, and more about personal career choices and managing one's way through an organisational labour market.

So what makes for 'good' career support in the workplace?

Getting the message straight - and positive

Employers in the UK - both public and private sector - have said pretty confusing things to their employees about careers over the last ten years or so. Employees still move from job to job within organisations, as well as between them, and most organisations aspire to fill the majority of their vacancies internally. Yet employees have been told that they cannot be promised a career, that career paths cannot be explained and that they have to manage their own careers. All of these things are true to some extent, but not nearly as much as organisations have said. Taking the last point - what we might call the issue of career ownership - employees certainly do need to take responsibility for their own careers. However, two other messages also need to be clearly heard.

The first is that there are many situations in which the organisation has a strong vested interest in taking the initiative with career development. Far from dying away in the age of the self-managed career, succession planning and high potential development programmes have been increasingly used. Why? Because it is downright negligent for an organisation to assume it can be passive in the development of higher level skills. This does not just apply at senior management levels. Good managers of any kind of team will be on the look out for those with potential to lead that team in future and will take steps to make sure that such individuals gain the necessary skills and encouragement to progress.

The second important message is that the organisation recognises that individuals who wish to develop their own careers need some kind of support from the organisation in doing so. At minimum this is about information on general types of job opportunity, skill needs and how to gain access to job moves. In some organisations the idea of 'career partnership' offers rather stronger support, with the organisation and the individual attempting a serious dialogue about career options and actions which will be of mutual benefit.

The 1990s were a decade of rather negative messages to employees - so much so that 'career' is in some places a taboo word. I would argue that the 'negative nineties' served quite a useful function in telling employees to take more ownership of their careers, but allowed employers to back off from their part to a dysfunctional degree. A forthright positive message might be: '*We want to make the most of your ability during the time you stay with us, and we will be an active partner in developing your career to meet your aspirations and our needs.*'

Processes for making career support a reality

Assuming we can brace ourselves for a more positive strategy, then what do we have to do to make it a reality?

If the organisation intends to plan proactively for some groups of employees, then it needs regular management processes to do this. Succession planning and development programmes are not inherently difficult but they do demand regular attention - for example to actually deliver the kinds of work experience identified for individuals. They are also bedevilled by lack of continuity as new HR Directors continuously stop, redesign and relaunch such schemes - much to the confusion of managers and the frustration of employees.

When it comes to the second strand of career development - supporting employees in developing their own careers -

the basic needs are just the same as those in other guidance settings. Employees need :

- a better view of themselves, especially relative to others. Skill reviews of the type often given in appraisal are not enough. Employees need to reflect on their own values and interests as well as abilities. They also need honest feedback on how the organisation perceives their potential as well as their current performance.
- to understand the range of types of work in the organisation and whether their own skills and experience would be considered relevant for these. They also need a broader understanding of how the organisation fits together and where it is headed in future. Employees are seldom given this 'tacit' understanding of the organisation - far removed from detailed lists of competencies required for each job.
- some support with thinking about their career plans. Some people seem to do this intuitively, but others don't have a clue how to start. Such support requires both some helpful frameworks (increasingly available on organisational intranets as self-study materials and exercises), but also someone to talk to - a problem we return to below.
- access to skill development. Employers are much better than in the past at training people for their current jobs, but not necessarily better at letting people develop for the jobs they aspire to.
- access to job moves. Organisations increasingly advertise internal vacancies but sometimes the job filling processes are so cumbersome that they effectively prevent anyone from getting a job they have not done before! Competence-based selection methods, if taken to extremes, can easily weed out all hope of career development.

A range of people to talk to

Looking at these needs, they do not mostly require 'career interventions'. Arguably the most important process of all is the way jobs are filled - not generally seen as a career process at all, but rather the resourcing function of HR. Skill development requires a strong link between career development and training - still sometimes a separate function from HR (or personnel).

The information aspects of career support also do not necessarily require specific career activities. Understanding the organisation and the kind of work different people do is important for all employees in doing their current jobs well, as they increasingly need to work across boundaries and get information from other people. Information about your own skills and potential should come from those around you. NICEC research has shown that both information and help with personal planning is more likely to come from good informal support from a wide variety of people of at work than just from the boss or through formal processes.

When people need a real re-think more specialist career help may be very useful. This may come from people in the HR (or training and development) function who have had extra training in assessment, counselling and career guidance. In some companies, managers can refer employees to such people for a few in-depth sessions to re-focus their career plans. Some organisations use external people (the trendy term seems now to be 'career coaches'), although usually only for senior staff or those somehow 'at risk'. This rather oddly means that if you are offered a career coach you don't know whether you are seen as high potential or about to get the sack!

On the whole, however, employees need such specialist help quite rarely. Neither do they get in a fuss about issues of 'impartiality' - always taking advice with a pinch of salt and learning that career moves are usually political. The issues of trust and confidentiality are both complex and important in the workplace. Career discussions are often not confidential, but sensible employees take careful decisions about what they say to whom, and make sure that they only really confide in those they trust. Mentors - either formal or informal - can provide very personal and in-depth career support and do not need to be guidance specialists to be effective. They help with both self-knowledge and organisational understanding, and can advise on the politics and tactics of making a job move. They also often make their own networks available to the mentee.

The gradual recognition that career support is going to come from a lot of people in a lot of different ways brings us very belatedly to the idea of career education in the workplace. We really need all managers to feel comfortable giving career advice to others, and all employees to feel they know how to ask for the help they need and manage their own careers. The skills and understanding to manage your own career and support others in developing their careers should be a core element of training at work, just as it should be a core component of education in schools and colleges.

So there are some important differences between career support in the workplace and that provided in more public settings, but there are also some striking similarities. The kinds of information and support needed by individuals are similar as are the issues of who should provide such support - and especially questions about the place for specialists in career guidance. It is also the case that if career skills were really acquired in school and further/higher education then career development at work would be much improved. The two worlds of career support certainly have much to learn from each other.

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Challenging Age: Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups

Geoff Ford and Patrick Grattan

The critical importance of career guidance in enabling older adults to make informed decisions about their future careers, learning and life styles is only beginning to be recognised. Many 45+ have received minimum support in coping with labour market change, redundancy, unemployment, issues concerned with workforce development and the need to retrain, and the personal and financial consequences of change. One result is widespread waste of third age skills, experience and potential.

DfES commissioned the Third Age Employment Network, in liaison with NICEC and the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby, to research and analyse the information, advice and guidance requirements of 45+ adults and how IAG Partnerships and specialist third age IAG agencies are responding to these requirements. Six IAG Partnerships and three specialist agencies took part in the research. This paper summarises some of the main findings.

This report is concerned with all those in their 40s, 50s, 60s and beyond, many of whom may encounter barriers that prevent full participation in employment, learning in and outside the workplace, career development programmes, and training to improve employability.

The Third Age is a time of change. Many wish to continue to work and contribute, but also want opportunities for new directions. Personal and financial responsibilities are often high - many individuals combine caring and parenting responsibilities, and some still have young children. The conflicting pressures often necessitate difficult choices and decisions.

The National context

People are living longer, working fewer years and saving less for their extended retirement. This is not sustainable. The decline in work amongst older people over the last 25 years has been halted but we face huge actual and potential waste of third age skills and experience with major consequences for the economy and the community. A Government report estimates that the drop in 50+ work rates costs the economy about £16 billion a year in lost GDP, and the public purse £3-5 billion in extra benefit and lost taxes (Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit Report, 2000. *Winning the Generation Game*). 33% of the working age population are over 50, and this figure is likely to reach 40% during the next 20 years.

Only 0.2 million men and women over 50 are registered unemployed. However, the numbers of economically inactive unemployed are 8 times higher than this; and many of these 'hidden unemployed', substantial numbers of whom are highly skilled and experienced, would like to work if opportunities were available.

Almost a third of men aged 50+, and two-thirds of those aged 60-64, are not in work. Life expectancy has risen by 30 years since the State Pension Age was fixed. Those in work are 50% less likely to participate in training than those aged 35-50. Many of the workless 50+ live in considerable poverty - 57% are in households with no occupational pension, and 40% are in the lowest fifth of income distribution for all age groups. These figures reveal the dimension of the problem if older age groups do not, or cannot, maximise their contribution to the economy and their community.

Government has introduced a number of important measures to improve opportunities in work and community activity for people aged 50+. It has designated older people as a priority group for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Partnerships. IAG Partnerships report directly to their Local Learning and Skills Council and are made up of organisations helping adults to find suitable education, training or work. Government has also created the Jobcentre Plus by combining the old Employment Service and Benefits Agency. Nearly 40% of working age adults on benefits are over 50 and the new combined service will be dealing with them all.

Who was involved?

The fundamental objective of Challenging Age was to consult older adults and analyse their views on what has or has not worked for them so that all organisations delivering information, advice, guidance and support can achieve better results.

Six IAG Partnerships - Derbyshire; Kent and Medway; Lincolnshire and Rutland; North London; Sunderland; and York and North Yorkshire - took part. This selection provided the opportunity to compare various economic and social contexts, including: inner cities; rural areas; urban areas experiencing significant unemployment, poverty and structural change; more apparently affluent areas; and areas with numbers of older people from different ethnic groups.

The research included three third age specialist support organisations, which offer a range of learning, guidance and employment services to older individuals. These are: Experience Works, Loughborough College; New Challenge, Ltd, Wembley; and Target Third Age York Ltd. Their involvement enabled the research team to compare and contrast the advantages of integrated and partnership approaches in helping the 45+.

An Evaluation model

A four-stage Evaluation Model was developed and piloted by Challenging Age:

(i) consulting with groups of older people;

(ii) collating and analysing the observations and feedback;

(iii) mapping and researching local provision in the light of the feedback;

(iv) using the information to review policy across the whole Partnership and planning future strategies.

Focus groups and telephone interviews can provide a rich source of data on: third age issues; individual experiences; the barriers facing the 45+; and interesting and good practice by partners and other agencies in helping older clients to overcome these. The richness of detail and wealth of feedback are contained in the reports on the focus groups and telephone interviews, and these are available from the Third Age Employment Network on request.

Issues identified

(i) Barriers

Many older people want to work, learn and earn but are encountering difficulties in doing so. Main barriers include: actual or perceived age discrimination, especially by employers; lack of local retraining opportunities; employer reluctance to train older people; the cost of learning and retraining; and difficulties in finding support agencies with staff who have the experience and expertise to assist older age groups - including listening, empathising, and providing the right forms of practical help.

Virtually all the 45+ and frontline workers consulted were concerned about the resulting waste of third age experience, skills and potential – in terms of the implications for individuals, local communities and the wider economy. The experience of rejection (real or perceived) can rapidly undermine morale, motivation and self-confidence, and cause many older people to give up and join the 'hidden unemployed'. Frontline workers spoke about the numbers of older people who write themselves off and regard themselves as 'too old' to work and learn.

In some geographical areas third age poverty is a main issue. The research shows that poverty erodes hope and in many cases also health (which has attendant costs); it also acts a barrier to jobsearch, and to learning and retraining. It can also reinforce fear, especially fear of change or taking a risk – for example, by taking short-term employment if this affects benefit entitlement. Many older people are worried about breaks in their pensions contributions, erosion of savings, and incipient and future poverty. Significant numbers want financial guidance alongside advice on work and learning.

(ii) The desire to contribute

However, the focus groups showed that financial concerns are only one of several reasons why many older people want to work. Most focus group members wanted to work, learn and continue to develop and utilise their abilities in their later years – to the benefit of the community and themselves. Many enjoy working, although they don't necessarily want to return to their previous occupations or work styles.

Quality of jobs as well as quantity is important. Work provides purpose, status, scope to use one's skills and abilities, and the opportunity to contribute to the community. A significant number of the focus group members didn't just want to find 'a job' – they also wanted an occupation, or 'vocation', that allowed them to express their (changing) values, interests and objectives, and to progress. The extent to which they could achieve this by volunteering and active citizenship, rather than within the paid labour market, differed according to individual circumstances.

(iii) Learning and workforce development

The unmet desire that significant numbers of under-performing older people have to work, learn, and develop their careers, is a key finding of immediate relevance to the Government's Workforce Development Strategy. The findings indicate that the Government's targets for adult skills cannot be met without large uplift in the skills of the over 45s.

Skill development and updating while in employment can help to ensure retention in the workforce, to the benefit of older individuals and their employers. Many people also want and need a 'second chance' if they, the economy and the community, are to avoid the risk of losing that potential energy and experience. This helps to explain the concern shown by many of those interviewed with the qualifying period of 6 months' unemployment for Jobcentre Plus programmes, including New Deal 50plus, Work Based Learning for Adults, Programme Centres and Work Trials. For many people aged 50+, there appear to be few - if any - alternative means of accessing affordable retraining programmes (other than IT) and sampling, gaining experience and proving themselves in new and alternative areas of employment. Successful employer-led workforce development programmes, which include older employees and trainees, are clearly critical.

(iv) Information, Advice and Guidance

During the focus groups, participants were asked to identify the forms of help and support they required in order to overcome barriers preventing them from working and learning. Although few used the term 'guidance', the activities they identified are integral to high quality IAG. They include:

- *Accessible, personally relevant, up-to-date and sufficiently detailed information* in relation to older people: (a) to assist career choice; (b) to identify suitable local opportunities (jobs, learning, volunteering); and (c) to locate local organisations that can help.
- *Expert advice* that helps them relate the information to their own circumstances.
- *Staff who are prepared to listen* and have the expertise and commitment to act as 'sounding boards' and 'sources of ideas', and to help.
- *Staff who motivate*, provide older people with hope and encouragement, and offer help and support in regaining lost confidence and self-esteem.
- *Staff continuity* – not having to repeat one's personal story on each visit.
- *Staff who offer skilled and personal support* over a period of time and to whom older people can return (i.e. personal advisers and mentors). Feedback also indicates that older people welcome *follow-up and 'tracking' of progress* because these show that agencies are interested and genuinely care.
- *Skilled assessment* – including help in identifying: *existing and transferable skills, aptitudes and experience*, and relating these to the current labour market; previously *unrealised potential;* and *preferred learning styles* (so that they can make optimum use of learning opportunities).
- Help with such areas as *personal presentation, writing CVs, interview techniques, jobsearch and self-advocacy* – including techniques to overcome age stereotyping and hidden or overt discrimination.
- *Training opportunities* that provide them with skills required by the local labour market, and which they can afford.
- Opportunities for *work trials, work sampling and work experience* so that they can try out their skills, find out about unfamiliar occupations and prove themselves to employers.
- *Peer group support* – to extend networks, provide motivation and encouragement, and support each other in achieving personal objectives.

Those providers that older people identified as being particularly helpful are all *highly personalised and 'people-focused' initiatives* that combine most or all of these activities into an *integrated service*. In most instances the initiatives also offer clients *opportunities to learn* on the same site – often because the providers are also learndirect centres and/or community learning projects.

Some frontline workers noted the similarities between the support requirements of many older people, and those of many young people aged 13-19 served by Connexions Partnerships. These parallels require more detailed consideration - including the opportunities that may exist for the *cost-effective use of existing services* and potential *economies of scale*.

Third age IAG provision needs to be *coherent, efficient, welcoming and properly targeted* if it is to be genuinely effective. Many 45+ are reassured by a *mix of ages on reception and other frontline positions*, and by the availability of older staff. The inclusion of these and other qualities and activities helps to explain the success of *multi-activity integrated services* (both 'third age specialist' and for all adult age groups) in helping the 45+ into learning and work. There are important resource issues here. Currently such provision, outside economic and social priority areas such as Sunderland, tends to be the exception rather than the rule, and is funded from a number of sources that are often short-term.

(v) Guidance and National Policy

The project demonstrated the importance of *adult guidance* in underpinning all Government programmes for adult skills and employability. The critical role and importance of guidance could be much better understood. Guidance helps individuals identify their own hopes, ambitions, abilities, and personal circumstances and relate them to the opportunities available to them.

The *information-gathering opportunities* offered by efficient IAG systems could be more extensively used to inform policy decisions. Those who work at the frontline, through their contact with individual members of the public, have valuable knowledge and experience of training and labour market issues, including the impact of national and local policy, gaps in national and local provision, and ways of overcoming barriers that may be inhibiting progress. The quality of the feedback received during Challenging Age indicates that national policy could benefit from finding ways to collect such feedback from frontline workers and carefully consider what is learnt.

More attention is needed on *the changing nature of people's skills, interests and values* as they grow older, and how these may match the demands of the current labour market. The evidence from Challenging Age suggests that research is required on third age skills and working patterns in order to inform policy and enable greater numbers of older people to optimise the contributions they can make to the economy and their local communities.

Issues identified by older people and front-line workers include:

- ensuring that legislation to limit *age discrimination* among employers is accompanied by positive national and local action to *change attitudes* towards older people in industry and community.
- The *6-month qualifying period of registered unemployment* for Jobcentre Plus programmes. Many older people and frontline workers consider the waiting period to be a cause of 'hidden unemployment' because it is seen to give time for the many 50+ who are keen to work at the point of redundancy, to lose motivation and employability, and withdraw from the labour market. The public feedback appears to run counter to Government statistics which show a high level of re-employment of registered unemployed over 50 within 6 months.
- *Pressure to accept unsuitable and low-level jobs*, even where this means giving up personal ambitions including career change and skill development. This appears to result from tensions between longer-term policies to promote workforce development and encourage lifelong learning, and short-term pressures to reduce national benefit levels and meet performance targets.
- *Risk of losing benefits* through taking low-paid employment, meaning that some older people may be worse off financially by working.
- The *cost of retraining*, and the *lack of retraining opportunities, including employer-led*, for older people.
- *Age restrictions* imposed on community learning and employment training initiatives by funding bodies.
- *Pension regulations*, which can prevent older employees from downshifting and working part-time for the same employer.

In summary, the key findings from Challenging Age are fourfold:

(i) For many individuals, the period from 45+ represents a key period of challenging career change as a result of changing labour markets, stereotypes of older employees, and the low value that may be placed on the skills and experience of older workers.

(ii) Many older people want to work, learn and continue to develop and utilise their abilities in their later years – to the benefit of the community and themselves. However, many are having difficulty in doing so and are giving up as a consequence.

(iii) Many want access to high-quality information, advice, guidance, retraining and other learning to enable them to overcome the barriers blocking their progress, and to maximise their personal contribution. Many want and need a 'second chance'.

(iv) The role of high-quality advice and guidance in helping many mid-life and older adults to work, learn and earn requires greater recognition. Potentially the benefits for individuals, employers, government revenues and personal savings towards retirement are considerable.

Guidance for older people therefore represents a huge area of potential and opportunity with benefits for employers, individuals, communities and the national economy. The challenge, as many of the individual stories told within the focus groups vividly portray, is to identify and introduce strategies and interventions that are genuinely successful in preventing the continued human waste of older people's abilities, experience and potential.

Notes

Copies of the full report, *Challenging Age – Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups*, can be obtained from the Third Age Employment Network or downloaded from the TAEN website. In addition to findings and recommendations, the main report contains case studies of interesting practice and operational tools laid out to aid copying of material for training and work purposes. These tools were developed by the research team: Geoff Ford, Barbara Watkins, Sara Bosley, Ruth Hawthorn, Barbara McGowan and Patrick Grattan.

Reports on the individual IAG Partnerships, third age specialist agencies and consultations with 45+ adults are also available from TAEN. These contain first-hand accounts of: older adults' experiences of IAG; the barriers they face in accessing work and learning, and in continuing to develop their careers; and their views on how to overcome these barriers.

The Learning and Skills Council is supporting dissemination of the research findings and of diagnostic and planning tools to assist IAG Partnerships and individual IAG providers to deliver their services for older age groups. These will be available in a dedicated CD for internal training purposes.

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Guidance and Employability in Higher Education

Val Butcher

The concept of what is meant by 'guidance' and the methods of guidance support and intervention have changed dramatically in higher education (HE) over the past ten years. The key shifts have been in the responsibility placed on learners to access one-to-one and on-line support in the context of self-preparation through introductory diagnostic processes; and the development of curricula which equip learners with the awareness and the abilities to manage their own progression through learning and work.

There has been much recent debate into the remit and role of HE careers services. Student employability is high on the Government agenda linked to the drive for widening participation. Employers and their organisations are still vociferous in demanding more work-ready graduates. Traditional methods of supporting effective student transition are increasingly found wanting in the face of expanding student numbers and the different needs of new learners.

The AGCAS Review

In 1997, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) itself commissioned a review by Tony Watts of possible ways forward: *Strategic Directions for HE Careers Services.*

This outlined four options which are based on strong embedding within the institution:

- The integrated Guidance model, in which careers services becomes an integral part of a continuous process available to students pre-entry, on entry and throughout their courses as well as on exit from them;
- The Integrated Placement model, in which the careers service's concern for placement on exit is joined by responsibility for course-related placements and placements into part-time and voluntary jobs;
- The Curriculum model, in which the careers service becomes a service designed to support academic departments in incorporating employability skills and career management skills into course provision, either as consultancy or delivery; and
- The Learning Organisation model, in which the careers service fosters the career development of all members of the institution, contract researchers and staff as well as students.

Three further options are based on delivering careers services post-graduation.

Whilst HE careers services continued to be expected to deliver aspects of all these models, there was a significant increase in the provision of assessed career development learning modules, both free-standing and within departments, delivered by careers service staff, academics or a combination of the two. This approach was supported and stimulated by eight *'Career Management in the Academic Curriculum'* projects funded by the DfEE between 1996 and 1998.

The Harris Review

In 2001, the 'Harris Review', *Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services,* was published. It recommended greater transparency in the provision that careers services were able to offer to various stakeholders, including statements of entitlement for students, for recent graduates and for employers. Institutions were invited to establish service level agreements between careers services and other parts of the organisation, if appropriate.

Closer partnerships between HE career services and other guidance providers was recommended. In addition, the quality standards already being developed by AGCAS were incorporated into the Guidance Council Standards to form the Matrix standards. These standards define the outcomes of a quality service whose aim is assisting individuals to make use of information, explore issues and plan courses of action in relation to learning and work - in essence, what a higher education careers service is all about. A significant number of HE careers services have been awarded these standards in the first year of operation.

In parallel with this, and supported by the Harris Review, there was an accelerated thrust to embed career development learning and employability in a much more integrated way into the academic curriculum; to build upon and extend the work of the earlier DfEE initiatives.

Three major initiatives

In 2002, three major initiatives indicated an overall will for higher education to grasp the nettle of what enhancing graduate employability might involve:

Lee Harvey
First, UUK commissioned a piece of research reviewing links between higher education and the world of work in the context of widening participation and increased student diversity. In it, Lee Harvey concluded 'In a few years, efforts to enhance employability have been transformed from an overemphasis on "bolting on" skills to imaginative initiatives designed to prepare graduates for lifelong learning in a manner that reflects the needs of workforce development and of social inclusion' although he cautions 'some academics think that embracing employability could infringe academic autonomy, undermine critique, and result in a shift in the balance away from education towards training'.

Skills Plus
Also in 2002, the Skills Plus Project, involving 17 departments from four universities in the North-West appraised their curricula based on a model developed by Knight and Yorke: the USEM model of employability in HE.

In the Skills *plus* project, employability was seen as being influenced by four broad and inter-related components:

1. Understanding.
2. Skills (the term is used here because of its significance in political and employment circles, but there is a real danger of its being given a simplistic and unhelpful interpretation – a term such as 'skilful practice' is probably more appropriate).
3. Efficacy beliefs, students' self-theories and personal qualities – of critical importance being the extent to which students feel that they might 'be able to make a difference' (not every time, but in a probabilistic way).
4. Metacognition, encompassing self-awareness regarding the student's learning, and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action.

ESECT
Finally, HEFCE funded a 30-month project commencing September 2002 which established the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) with a remit to draw together, disseminate and add to best practice in the enhancement of graduate employability:

ESECT sees employability as a challenge to higher education to put more emphasis on a set of achievements that are very compatible with widely-shared hopes for undergraduate learning. ESECT is concerned to help stakeholders promote these educational and employability-oriented achievements through good teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment design.

Over the coming two years, there will be significant research and dissemination of good practice and challenges in enhancing student employability in HE. Not the least of the challenges is the need for a variety of stakeholders to articulate with greater precision what they mean by 'employability'.

Implications for research

In terms of research need, it seems timely to consider:

1. What does 'guidance' mean in the context of the current employability debate?
2. How far and in what ways do the curricular interventions being developed in fact equip the individual for effective progression through learning and work?
3. What might be successful components of 'Do-It-Yourself' guidance?

Note

All ESECT publications will be available, as they are produced, on the LTSN Generic Centre website www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre

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Aiming for Higher Education: Challenges to Careers Education and Guidance in a Changing World

Rob Ward

With the major expansion of students entering Higher Education (HE), and continuing changes in the arrangements for student funding, the issue of the role of Higher Education has come into sharper focus. From the perspective of the current government, the rationale for expansion combines social justice with economic rationales. Thus:

'In a fast changing and increasingly competitive world, the role of higher education in equipping the labour force with appropriate and relevant skills ...is central' (DfES, 2003)

This expansion also places new challenges upon pre-HE guidance provision and upon HE itself. The former reflects increasing emphasis on the widening participation agenda (itself a reflection of the concerns for social justice and harnessing the talents of citizens) and concurrent changes to both the pre-HE curriculum and the organisation of guidance practice; the latter reflects the growing diversity of entrants. Given such increasing diversity, the 'pre-HE experience' is becoming increasingly difficult to categorise. All non-graduate members of the population are potentially part of this experience with entry to HE being possible through a variety of entry routes and pathways, some structured via programmes and courses, some highly individual. Mature entrants in particular may enter HE for highly individual reasons that may not relate to future occupational career progression. Some may be returning after a career break, others seeking new directions after redundancy, still others taking advantage of retirement to pursue new possibilities. Here, I can do no more than sketch out a range of issues evident through the literature and highlight some emerging research needs.

Areas of importance

This paper is based upon a paper produced for the recently appointed National Co-ordination Team for Student Employability (Ward & Pierce, 2003). It seeks to identify three areas of importance for guidance practitioners in the emerging context to which research can make a contribution.

1. **In relation to learners, there is a need for more information on the starting points of entrants to HE in terms of career development and employability.**

The successive overlay of policy initiatives in this area (Ainley, Barnes & Momen, 2002) has provided much descriptive information but limited evaluation evidence (particularly external evaluation). Where evaluation work has been undertaken, the focus has emphasised elements of government policy related to the social exclusion agenda. Such a policy focus is clearly evident in terms of research output (see, e.g. Richie, 2000; Fieldhouse, Kaira. & Alam, 2002; and Bynner & Parsons, 2002). In contrast, as Barnes, Donoghue & Sadler (2002) note:

'Little research has been carried out into the career development and guidance needs of gifted and talented students'. (p. 9)

2. **In terms of providers, there is a clear need to evaluate changes in the provision of careers education and guidance on those seeking to progress into HE.**

In the field of careers guidance, provision has been re-oriented in support of specific policy initiatives, manifest in the move from Careers Services - with a remit to support the career thinking of the whole student cohort - to the Connexions Service. The integrated approach to providing information, advice and guidance to young people across all aspects of development of the kind which underpins Connexions may serve to limit the visibility of careers provision, and overt messages concerned with career management or employability, (see Twigg 2002; Watts, 2001). The impact of the 'focusing' agenda prior to Connexions also appears to have had a more direct impact leading to a reduction of resources allocated to work in education of 15-25% during 1998-2000, with *larger reductions in post 16 work* (QPID, 2001, cited in Barnes, Donoghue & Sadler, 2002). Evidence from a study undertaken for the DfES by Morris, Rickinson & Davies (2001) reinforced concerns that the status of careers education and guidance may be lessened by this association with 'problem students', whilst further reporting that over half of the careers service managers involved in the research felt that the 'focusing agenda' had led to significant difficulties in maintaining the profile of careers education and guidance within schools.

3. **In terms of the curriculum, there is a need to review how change in the pre-HE curriculum is impacting upon the career development starting points of HE entrants.**

This is necessary both immediately and in the longer term.

In respect of immediate need, Curriculum 2000, a new post-16 curriculum introduced in September 2000, has provided a range of new and revised qualifications at Advanced level. One aim of this innovation was to support 'curriculum breadth' by enabling students to:

- study 'more subjects and/or a wider range of subjects;
- continue academic and vocational study;
- develop Key Skills;
- participate in enrichment activities.

Early survey data suggests that progress in respect of the first of these, the impact upon careers education and guidance (CEG) provision, appears to have been mixed at best. Curriculum enrichment time, where CEG has been concentrated, has itself come under severe pressure, especially when combined with less external support from outside (see above). Less directly, the pressure to 'cover the content' in a new and high profile curriculum has led to those more independent approaches to learning and teaching which may promote the characteristics associated with personal and career development to be sidelined. Similarly, opportunities for extra-curricular initiatives, where a range of skills can be emphasised, have themselves come under pressure from both the increasing demands of the curriculum and of part-time employment. The latter may also appear to lessen the need for a strong emphasis upon preparation for working life in the pre-HE curriculum, especially if the formal transition from full-time education to full-time employment is perceived to have been delayed until graduation.

Understandably, given limited time and resources, the focus of careers education and guidance in such a context is upon the next transition in terms of securing access to Higher Education. This focus may be given additional emphasis by the concerns of the Government to widen participation in HE. This preparation for the next transition may also be no different from that which has gone before. It could be set within a richer framework which emphasises a shift towards individuals taking responsibility for managing their own careers in learning and work, and delivered within the context of curriculum enrichment work. However, even this work has come under pressure and the gap between rhetoric and reality may be becoming more apparent.

The longer term

In the longer term, there will be a need to review how the emerging 14-19 curriculum model emphasising greater curriculum flexibility - for some students at least - will impact upon the career management skills of HE entrants. Flexibility has already been manifest in opportunities to allow the 'disapplication' of individuals from certain statutory subjects at Key Stage 4 (from 1998) and, from 2002, an 'Increased Flexibility' programme facilitating learning for 14-16 year old students within work contexts whether in colleges of further education, with training providers or via the new GCSEs in vocational subjects. Most recently, the *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* document (DfES, 2003a Annexe 3) identified some 270 local partnerships that are expected to involve over 2,000 schools and 30,000 pupils with additional funding for the development of further partnerships. Such moves, and the general shift to a more unitised pre-HE curriculum requiring more regular choices and decisions by students, may strengthen the self and career management skills of entrants. For this to happen, they would need access to enhanced levels of guidance and support in mastering such processes. While current developments do not seem to have made a significant impact on those considering HE, this will be an area of future interest.

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Literature Reviews: Their Place in the Scheme of Things

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In the spring of 2002, NICEC was commissioned by the Guidance Council to prepare a literature review of any research that was relevant to information, advice and guidance for specific groups of disadvantaged adults, particularly those in the key target groups that were identified for special attention by the new Learning and Skills Councils. This exercise was woven into the growing momentum for promoting better use of research to inform policy and professional practice. A NICEC paper on the findings of the review was included at a special conference on this theme at Stoke Rochford in May that year, and that conference in turn was a starting point for other initiatives to carry the research momentum forward. The Department for Education and Skills' commissioned a feasibility study for a comprehensive research database in the summer of that year, and then funded the development of an internet-based database-cum-discussion forum (the National Careers Research Database). This is being done by the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University, working with the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby and also NICEC. The Department has also commissioned the Guidance Council to develop a National Research Forum and has, indeed, also contributed funding for the second NICEC Cutting Edge research conference in April 2003.

The preparation of a literature review is a learning process in at least three different ways. The first is figuring out what they are and how to do them. Anyone who writes a dissertation for an MA or a PhD knows it as a basic academic skill they will have to acquire at some point: how to search library catalogues and electronic data-bases and check for other more ephemeral material, how to sift for relevance, how to group and then how to put together a narrative argument that links them all to each other and to the topic in question. This kind is a necessary preliminary, not an end in itself. It has its counterpart in the more policy-oriented research and evaluation work familiar to us consultants in the guidance field, and I shall argue that this needs development.

The free-standing literature review (of the kind we prepared last year) also has its academic as well as policy/practice-oriented versions. One purpose of these is to offer a starting-point for people faced with the project-specific literature search just mentioned; another can be to review what we know about a topic and recommend where more research needs to be done.

The second kind of learning from literature reviews is finding out what makes a good one. As with any aspect of research, one trick is to get the scale of the topic right: too narrow and it is of interest to too small a group of people, but too broad and it raises far too many issues which get lost in a long list of priorities for future work. In our review of IAG for disadvantaged adults, we tried to get round this by breaking it down into different kinds of target groups, but this had its own difficulties: for some groups there is hardly enough published research to warrant a mini-review of its own, but the issues raised by that group are diminished if you cluster them with other groups. And generalisations about the research gaps surrounding IAG work of disadvantaged adults get emptier and more obvious the more groups that are included.

The other quality issue, particularly for the free-standing model, is whether to go for comprehensiveness or focus on the good; if the second, the problem is how to anticipate the needs of the reader, and I want to say more about this. Another issue, particularly for the non-academic version of the free-standing model, is whether to limit it strictly to published academic research, or whether to include other material such as good practice guides. These are, after all, based implicitly on non-formal professional learning. If we should also include policy documents, particularly in subject areas like IAG that are driven by public funding and therefore official opinion, such literature proliferates: where should we draw the line?

The third kind of learning is when you start to wonder who *actually and really* does use them and what do they really use them *for*? In the academic context the first kind, the ones that are the precursors of original research, are used partly to establish credibility, to demonstrate that you're acquainted with the other work in this field. They are also used by other academics who want to mine your work for their own literature reviews. We did wonder whether the main use of the free-standing non-academic kind might be limited to the other people commissioned to write free-standing non-academic literature reviews on related topics – and more seriously, if that was in any way true, how we could make ours more useful to the people it was supposed to serve. Who were they?

One idea behind bringing research findings closer to policy and practice was to get practitioners to read the research and let it inform their practice – the concept of 'evidence-based practice' is a commonplace in many professions (though not always clearly understood). Evidence-based practice also urges practitioners to carry out research projects of their own, and engage directly in the cumulative learning of the research community. So practitioners are one important potential user group for a literature review.

The second potential user group is what we are loosely calling policy-makers: this can include anyone who actually makes policy (at national or local or even institutional level) through to people who interpret it by their management decisions at any of those levels. Recently people have been arguing the need not just for evidence-based practice, but for 'theory-based policy, i.e. to use what we know from the social sciences to make wiser decisions about the use of resources to achieve the goals we all share, in our case helping people plan their careers. I believe we should be working harder to promote this, and the humble literature review could help.

A third potential-user group is us researchers, evaluators and consultants. If we are going to do our job efficiently and thus hopefully make better use of the public funds that come our way (at the expense, never forget, of much-needed direct provision), we need to build on what has gone before. This obvious element of good practice is remarkably rare, and where evaluations of public funding programmes carry bibliographies they rarely extend beyond a few public policy documents and a handful of reports by the same authors as the evaluation itself.

Perhaps no more is necessary for the immediate purpose. But researchers and evaluators working in the policy arena do have a wider responsibility. One of the most striking ways in which public resources are squandered, as perceived by practitioners and consultants still in the field after twenty or so years, is how little is remembered from initiatives experienced and evaluated in the past but now forgotten. We tend to blame the government departments: the combination of the turnover in the 'permanent' civil service with the politician's need to be seen to have found a single big new solution to enduring social problems. Certainly this contributes to the process whereby quiet successes get scrapped and rediscovered over and over again, and money is wasted on hyping huge new systems that address some problems but often exacerbate others. But there are other factors that contribute.

We need to look again at this institutionalised forgetting. The pressures on government departments are not going to change: they are among the givens in the policy world we are trying to inform. We ourselves share some of the responsibility for allowing governments to scrap and reinvent. (Indeed in a depressing sense we have an interest in it, because each time experience is lost, our advice will be needed to set up the systems again.) One way we can help is to ensure that our evaluations, reports and recommendations do build on findings from earlier projects and indeed, research, pointing out what lessons were learnt last time and what should be carried forward to the next. We need to do this diplomatically but insistently. And we need easily useable research databases in order to do it within the tight timescales that these projects always involve.

Our experience of wheels being reinvented also inevitably breeds cynicism. So when a government initiative does address the issues we know are important, and does consult with the people who should know, and does adopt timescales that might really provide answers, we may be taken by surprise. The DfES was responsible for some large scale impact studies during the last decade such as John Killeen's *Does Guidance Work?*, and the Employment Retention and Advancement demonstration project currently developing under the Department for Work and Pensions promises yet more policy applications of reflective learning. We need to be able to switch from critical to supportive mode quickly, and make sure such initiatives get the attention they deserve from the guidance community and find their place in the collective memory of the community of practice – another role for literature reviews, to keep drawing our attention to the good and the useful.

The barrier between the narrow scholarly world of the academic, and the pragmatic political world of the practitioner or consultant, is not an inevitable and immutable one. Students on the postgraduate careers courses conduct their own small-scale research projects, and among the things they learn are the criteria by which they should be assessing any research they read or do throughout their professional life. They may even go on to commission evaluation studies and we want them to be discerning in this. The research of the evaluation type, the bread and butter of many consultants outside universities, should have more exacting judges. It could aim a little higher by borrowing some of the usages of academic work: a slightly more critical and honest interpretation of statistics based on tiny samples, for example, or indeed, literature searches beyond their immediate experience. These could raise the status of the genre and foster the habit of looking back first before looking forward.

Literature reviews could help with this if they were tailored better to the purpose. We do not need to follow the scholarly model exactly. Many of our potential users are going to want their references in a hurry and they may not have time to follow them up and read the whole thing (just like academics). We can have a pretty good guess as to the kind of search headings they want, and we know they'll prefer references from the last five years. And they won't want a great many of them. This does not need to mean any compromise of standards. These literature reviews should contain academic material, and not just from career theory and research but from the mainstream academic disciplines of sociology, psychology, economics and so on, which is why we need scouts from these fields to guide us. They should include non-academic material such as evaluations of past initiatives. They must be discerning and exclude the shabby, and carry a commentary on any flaws in otherwise interesting work. But most importanly they must be constructed and presented in a way that a busy practitioner or consultant working to deadlines is really going to use.

How well did our literature review measure up to these standards? We did try to think about the potential users from those areas of policy and practice, and structure it with their search questions in mind. We hesitated about including good practice guides and ended up with a few only, in the sub-topics where there was least published research. We made plenty of recommendations, about literature reviews and about topics in need of further research. But I suspect it will end up of little use except to the next person who is commissioned to write a literature review for the main reason that it is published in paper form and therefore the energy and thinking that went into its construction faded soon after it was printed. We learnt a great deal from doing it, as the authors always undoubtedly do. But unless some way can be found to spread that energy and thinking to a wider group, and keep it going, and until practitioners, policy-makers and consultants really want to know what was learnt from what went before, there is something rather inward-looking and lonely about a literature review. I have high hopes that the National Careers Research Database will foster this process of bringing it in out of the cold: we all have a great deal to gain from it.

Note

Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults in Key Target Groups: a Literature Review by Ruth Hawthorn, Malcolm Maguire and Lesley Haughton, is published by the Guidance Council and costs £10.

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The Emerging Research Infrastructure in Career Education and Guidance: an Informal Briefing

Ruth Hawthorn

This briefing was written to clarify the relationship between the National Careers Research Database and the National Research Forum for Information, Advice and Guidance on Learning and Work. Happily both are at a very early stage and can develop in ways that support each other. Indeed the Guidance Council is carrying out a wide-ranging consultation before recommending the shape of the National Research Forum.

National Careers Research Database (NRCD)

In late 2002, the University of Warwick's Institute for Employment Research (IER) received funding from the Department for Employment and Skills (DfES) to set up the NCRD. The IER is carrying this out over two years in collaboration with the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) at the University of Derby, and the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC). It follows from four related but separate initiatives:

- a European Social Fund (ESF) ADAPT project involving the University of East London and other UK and European partners that explored the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support the knowledge development of guidance practitioners;
- an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) bid from the IER supported by a range of partners from the guidance community (including the Guidance Council) which outlined the case for a research database;
- a conference in May 2002 organised by the Guidance Council (GC) in association with CeGS, University of Derby funded by the DfES at Stoke Rochford on the future of research in Career Guidance; and
- a feasibility study for a national research database commissioned by the DfES and carried out in the summer of 2002 by CeGS, NICEC and IER.

The NRCD project is linked to another project analysing the long term impact of various guidance interventions on adult clients over five years.

The NRCD is not limited to a simple database of research reports. It is currently seen as consisting of three elements:

i. Future Trends: labour market information focusing on market changes and skills needs. This component grew out of an ADAPT project in which the University of East London was the lead partner.

ii. A Research Database: to be linked to a comprehensive library of guidance materials known as the National Learning Resource for Guidance based at CeGS (and incorporating the NICEC library as well as that of the ICG).

iii. Effective Guidance: this is the collective learning dimension, divided into six strands (equal opportunities, impact analysis, using research in practice, improving practice, lifelong learning, and international perspectives).

During the life of the project function (iii) will be developed by six separate groups of experts drawn from different guidance sectors and roles (policy, practice, research) who will identify gaps, key areas or problems in that particular aspect of guidance work. The 'product' will be developed through a website which will contain the research database but also six separate discussion forums, to be subdivided along lines suggested by the participating experts. When this 'learning community' is launched it will be open to the whole field, including practitioners, managers, policymakers, trainers and researchers. The aim is to provide a resource for all these groups as well as to encourage participation.

One feature of this project at present is its use of ICT and post-structuralist language, and this could be confusing to the uninitiated. The medium of presentation is described as a 'comprehensive telematics platform...It will support collaboration, knowledge transformation and the creation of a dynamic community of practice and research' (Project Summary, November 2002). The technical support is provided by an organisation called theknownet.

Another feature which is at first sight rather confusing is that the website is currently called the Guidance for Adults Research *Forum*. This is partly explained by the shared parentage of the two initiatives: the name was agreed at the end of the ADAPT project in 2000 before the initiative divided in two. And it is early days, so both the language and the technology can be adapted better to serve the goals of this project and distinguish it from the other.

The NCRD project is being evaluated by Marcus Offer, NICEC fellow.

The National IAG Research Forum (NRF)

This too has its roots in the Stoke Rochford conference of May 2002. The DfES is funding the Guidance Council (GC) to establish a forum 'through a process of consultation and design followed by a two-year period of pilot activity' (Consultation Document, February 2003). The objectives of the forum are (summarised from the same document):

i. to develop a coherent research strategy relevant to policy and practice;

ii. to identify research priorities, linking closely with the NCRD;

iii. to 'provide a strategically co-ordinated approach to research into IAG' to support investment decisions;

iv. to bring a wide range of potential stakeholders into the decision-making about research funding, and encourage the use of findings to inform policy and practice.

As far as can be seen from the questions in the consultation document (www.guidancecouncil.com/consultation/index2.asp) the NRF may consist of a large group of representatives from different interested bodies, rather like the GC itself, though this is still all to be decided. Possible roles include acting like one of the academic research councils, deciding priorities for public research funding and organising peer review of research proposals; or being more proactive, providing research mentors to encourage practitioners and others to undertake research and advising on other sources of research funding.

NICEC has a role in this development stage of the NRF, and will be putting together a paper mapping key agencies and publications and identifying major research gaps.

The DfES is to be congratulated in opening these decisions to external experts and hopefully it will reduce the all-too-familiar overlap and gaps. The NRF will also be in a position to monitor government response to policy recommendations emerging from research commissioned by the DfES and other departments.

The distinction and relationship between the two initiatives

The first is becoming clear, and the second should be symbiotic: one bringing research within reach of policy and practice, and the other providing a research policy and strategy body. But:

i. Unless the two bodies actually merge there are issues around the name of the NRCD website which at present imply that the website *is* the Forum.

ii. The NRF will include work with young people, and it would be sensible if the NRCD could also be expanded to do so.

iii. Because the DfES covers England only, there has been some concern that the scope of both initiatives would be restricted geographically. However the NRF has been given the go-ahead to work over the whole of the UK and to make its work available internationally and there are already plans to extend the NRCD to Scotland. It is the DfES's intention that both should cover all four home countries and it seems only a matter of time before that will happen.

iv. A number of the same people are likely to be involved in both, so the sooner the working relationship between them can be resolved the easier it will be for the field to understand what is going on.

Other related initiatives

EPPI

The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) is part of the Social Science Research Unit (SSRU) at the Institute of Education, University of London. One of its activities is a Research Evidence in Education Library, providing a 'centralised resource for people wishing to undertake reviews of available research and those wishing to use reviews to inform policy and practice'. Systematic literature reviews are undertaken by thematic Review Groups. CeGS has been commissioned to establish a Review Group on transitions for young people within educational contexts.This involves a group of experts drawn from a wide range of oragnisations such as NICEC, NACGT, Connexions Services, The Children & Young People's Unit, IER and CeGS who are all involved in advising on the development of the systematic literature review. Through EPPI the Review Group Team will be given training in how to conduct literature reviews. EPPI is close to an education version of the medical Cochrane Library (www.update-software.com/cochrane) which is likely to inform the model for the database part of the NCRD (with small groups of researchers and practitioners taking responsibility for the maintenance of different sections of the database and updating simple mini-literature reviews on different topics).

Guidenet (www.guidenet.org)

This is an EU Leonardo da Vinci-funded pilot project led by Careers Europe with eight other European partners. It aims to establish a European network of expertise, offering 'the UK Guidance community an opportunity to network and establish links with a wide range of guidance and education organisations throughout the EU, EEA and pre-accession countries. The Guidenet project will establish a transnational network of expertise to gather together guidance initiatives, evaluate and comment upon them and to disseminate them as widely as possible within the guidance communities in Europe. That there is a need for such a network can be demonstrated by the interest shown in practice and developments in other countries by policy makers and practitioners in Europe. The primary target groups for Guidenet are guidance counsellors, guidance organisations, policy makers and other actors in the guidance field at all levels nationally and transnationally.' The project runs for three years ending in November 2004. Links have already been established between GUIDENET and the National Careers Research Database/Forum.

Note

This briefing was seen in draft by Cathy Bereznicki, Jenny Bimrose, Geoff Ford, Deirdre Hughes, John Killeen and Malcolm Maguire. I have gratefully incorporated their comments, but any errors or omissions are my own.

Bongos, Jockeys and Young Victors

Bill Law

Guidance must say how it improves people's lives. The more ways we can do that the better. The easier it is to understand what we say, the better. Concerns with raised standards, economic benefits and employability have, it is rightly claimed, attracted positive political attention - and have probably helped us to survive.

But survival is only part of the agenda: and now is the time to re-focus - seeking more precise links between guidance causes and helping effects, with more attention to what we can show are credible effects, and offering a clearer focus on what is essential to our work.

It raises questions about the roles of research-and-development organisations in this field. Intellectual rigour is assumed, but for what purpose? Advocacy? Commentary? Critique?

Much hangs on credibility, a perennial issue for think tanks. These players in civil society have much to teach us about ensuring a sustainable future for careers work.

According to a MORI poll, Victor Meldrew has been resurrected as a forty-something, with a yet longer list of gripes - about working hours, career uncertainty, work-life imbalance, job-pointlessness and work stress.

What is there to gripe about?

Nobody could accuse the careers-work field of ignoring the way in which work is changing. We have plenty to say about the demands that work now makes on people - for skills, mobility and self-management. But there is more to say. We need to understand the effects of eroded work contracts, changing workplaces and attenuated working relationships. Any essential account of career development demands an understanding of the impact of change on personal well-being and on domestic and neighbourhood life.

A global environment connects everything to everything. Our contemporaries can make links that would have been lost to their forebears: consumers recognise the politics in purchases; parents understand child-care as work; and volunteers see *the www* as a tool for pursuing their purposes. And, in career development, 'self' into 'opportunity' doesn't always go: where people cannot find purpose in a work role, they look for it elsewhere. We need to understand why and how criminality features in this calculation.

Academic John Gray insists that globalisation is, at root, exponentially improved ICT. But communication both links and separates. It is true that people can access all kinds of media images. But they tend to access the sources with which they already agree. The logos, the raps, the beliefs and the values of contemporary communication isolate as much as they connect. This is what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks calls the 'tribalisation' of our associations - the converse of globalisation.

Maybe Victor is having trouble coming to terms with his children. It is sometimes cosily suggested that parents are the big influence on children's career; but there is more to it than that. The Learning and Skills Council have recently found that a good many mums and dads - in the interests of peace and quiet – prefer to steer clear of the subject. The essential fact is that past experience - one's family's and one's own - no longer helps a person to see future possibilities in the way it once did.

And so, as this year's BBC Reith lecture suggests, lurking beneath the surface of Victor's unfocussed unease are issues of trust. Who can he turn to for credible answers about his work - and his children's. Guidance professionals will want to claim that they can be trusted. But how would Victor know?

For that matter, how would we?

Questions are important

In order to trust, a person needs an estimate of the other's credibility. That means being able to bounce one idea off another; and that, of course, means more than one source.

Economics commentator Jeremy Rifkin looks to 'civil society' as a source of alternative perspectives in the contemporary world. The concept is sociologist Antonio Gramsci's: he suggested that an overlapping range of ideas for action is organised around three centres - government, markets and civil society. Civil society includes professional, religious, cultural and social organisations. It means that Victor can make sense of his life in terms not wholly defined by political and economic interests.

Distrust of government and commerce is, for well-publicised reasons, widespread and deepening. Yet, it would be a kind of desperation to assume that all national politicians and senior business people are liars, and that any other voice must - therefore - be more trustworthy. It is not like that; it is that, although civil society may not necessarily bring 'the answers', it can come up with another way of usefully asking the questions.

Non-government organisations are civil society's growth area. They focus on human needs, and what can be done to meet them. Some are big-time, in the media every day: 'Amnesty International' speaks for the oppressed in all societies; 'Médecine Sans Frontières' is watchful for people in seriously damaged societies; 'Mind' offers direct-access support to the deeply distressed and their families. They undertake probing enquiry, analysis and the dissemination of ideas for action.

But not all of Amnesty's people are lawyers; nor Médecine's, medics; nor Mind's, therapists. They each need more than 'the profession' can provide - to credibly bounce one idea off another. They also need media savvy.

Guidance has its NGOs: The Guidance Council , The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance and NICEC belong to civil society. All NGOs have modest beginnings: Amnesty got started because Peter Benenson thought that ordinary people's letters could persuade governments to release political prisoners. To some extent he was right.

But, although our NGOs are not yet big-time, some will be. The trends say that some such organisation will eventually establish itself in a global role. There are more than 30,000 global NGOs, and there will be more. They grow in parallel with a strengthening of corporate and a weakening in government power (offering some validation to Antonio Gramsci's original proposition). The big-time NGOs are probing organisations; asking the questions that government and commerce would rather evade.

Guidance asks 'how is career development best enabled?'. But that central question can - without distortion - be reformulated into 'who gets to do what in our societies?'. And, in such terms, this agenda is well worth setting alongside Amnesty's, Médecine's and Mind's. Trust depends - more than on anything - on what questions you are prepared to ask. The emergence of a probing NGO for guidance is not only probable, it is desirable.

But we should be careful: NGOs are not as pure as the driven snow; Greenpeace is serially accused of bias (though the indictment is usually leveled by some 'enterprising' corporation or 'deregulating' government). Victor must decide such matters on a case-by-case basis. What is important is that he is being given more to go on than could come from agro-chemical conglomerates and the politicos whose support they enlist.

Success encourages mutation: NGOs can now thrive on the boundaries between civil society and government, and between civil society and markets. Business-organised NGOs are referred to by anthropologist Tessa Morris Suzuki as 'BONGOs'; and government-run NGOs as 'GRINGOs' (of which QUANGOs are a sub-species). These hybrids sometimes represent what journalist Alex deWaal calls 'the co-option of dissent' - recruiting formerly independent voices to their own purposes. On the matter of trust: BONGO and GRINGO *bona-fides* can be questioned. And Victor should take account of the fact that some survivors rely on sexual-selection (appearance) rather than natural-selection (substance).

Civil society probes in other ways: academics and journalists are also enquiry-driven. Media commentators Greg Philo and David Miller claim that academics have become quiescent, leaving journalists to ask what some interests do not want answered. Journalist Nick Davies has done as much as any academic to portray the impact of change on people's lives. And, to be fair to academics, sociologist Richard Sennett undermines the banalities of management-speak, with his accounts of the erosion of understanding and attachment at work.

What unifies credible journalists, well-grounded academics and *bona-fide* NGOs is that they ask good questions - questions that we most need to be answered in order to know what most needs to be done. They also get those questions answered. It is a rare ability. Guidance needs to do it. And young Victor needs it done.

What makes good questions?

Nick Davies and Richard Sennett report what some don't want to hear; they create discomfort. They are nuisances with:

- clear focus;
- acceptance of complexity;
- concern for the local;
- uncluttered view of interests.

In a word – 'independence'.

1. Focussing the essentials

A criticism of organisations like Greenpeace is that they shape agendas to reflect prevalent fears. It is understandable: survival depends on a broad base of support. But, in Antonio Gramsci's terms, the move crosses the border, from 'civil' to 'market', or to 'political', territory.

We have - from time to time - also been drawn. During the 1980-90s the Confederation British Industries published a series of booklets supporting guidance. The focuses were national economic competitiveness, employable skills and work-relevant education. These are employer interests; and this BONGO is there to press them. But the message was infused with the rhetoric of 'putting individuals first', and so it seemed right for guidance to hitch its wagon to the CBI - its status, visibility and access to government.

But the skill-based and individualistic ideas articulating this series of publications was already professionally out-of-date. We already knew that emotionally-laden motivation is at least as important in career development as skill acquisition. And we were beginning to understand that individual career development is - for good or ill - fed by the encounters, expectations and structures of social life. Nonetheless the CBI came up with a concept of an individual, engaging a skills-based 'careership', driven by market forces. And guidance was vulnerable to policy whim, and the CBI formula offered hope of survival.

I made a mistake. There were, at that time, some strong and subtle minds in the CBI - not least of them Howard Davies's. We might well have won a hearing for a deeper and more dynamic conception of career. In particular, I had begun work on getting DOTS out of its social vacuum, through community-interaction theory. But, having found what I needed for practical purposes, I did not follow through for policy purposes. Phil Hodkinson, who later restarted work on the social context of career, remarked that community-interaction theory had never been fully articulated. He was right.

The most important feature of any research programme is not the elegance of its methodology, but the direction of its enquiry. From the time of the CBI publications, guidance veered dramatically - trying to demonstrate economic benefits, raised standards and improved employability.

And we still don't know whether we can deliver them. We don't even know for sure whether they would serve national interests: former CBI director, Adair Turner, in his book *Just Capital*, now argues that 'national competitiveness' was an impossibly muddled idea, with a far-from-simple relationship to worker skills. A recent report from the Institute of Social and Economic Research relates the personal version of that national story: there is no straightforward correlation between doing well in education and career success.

You can't blame guidance for being concerned with survival. But we also need an independent and probing NGO to point out the downside effects of that preoccupation.

2. Simplicity not simple-mindedness

Life's complications can overwhelm, but over-simplifying them is also dangerous. Acknowledging only one factor in the situation is to create a 'single-input system'. Systems-specialist Mark Taylor suggests that this is how things get frozen into inflexibility and uniformity.

The trouble is that 'multiple-input systems' also have their problems: often enough falling into disorder. So, in working on problems, it is good to bounce one idea off others - but not too many others.

Take non-accredited careers-education courses: which are usually institutionally marginal. To get off the margin, we might say, we must be accredited. Single-input, single-response.

A multiple-input version would look deeper: there is a relative lack of transfer-of-learning in accredited courses, but transferability is an absolute requirement of careers education. Look wider: careers education is part of a movement for life-role relevance in curriculum, but this would be hampered by separate-subject status. Look for the dynamics: examinability risks losing much of its resources, coverage and processes, but it is these which give the best of careers education its impact. And so by playing only for position we could wind up with high-status futility. We would not be the first.

Important complexity does get hidden. Take policy: there are always more possibilities than the launch-event envisages. The progressive professional elaboration of the initially simple Technical and Vocational Education Initiative was critical to its success.

Dealing with complexity means knowing the difference between facts and factors: facts sift into factors; and factors give us our key concepts. There are always a multitude of facts, but they must be reduced to an optimal number of factors. Three-to-five is manageable ('D', 'O', 'T', 'S' - count them!). One factor is at least two-too-few. And so 'single-input' is a fixated mouse, aware only of the cheese. But, 'multiple input' is a disordered rabbit, with too many ways to run. Us rabbits need liberating simplicity, and them mice offer only entrapping simple-mindedness.

Take Connexions: which must work with the deeply-embedded allegiances, attachments, and feelings of 'the excluded'. But it also seriously disturbs the structures of careers work; it provokes a scramble for resources; and it badly needs to learn how operationally to manage diversity and conflict,. Your mouse might think he knows where the cheese is, but my rabbit can get very confused.

Argument number one for complexity is that simplicity ignores too much. We need to be able to sift complexity into useful order. Such thinking is hard won, bouncing one idea off another. It is not achieved by masking troublesome complexity: that would be simple-mindedness.

And so, evidence-based practice cannot be a single-input guide to action. Research results in careers work are rarely conclusive because of the complexity: too many variables, variations, and variabilities. Mapping the links between research questions, findings, contexts and indications are classic examples of the need to take one thing with another. It is why former senior civil servant Neil Williams (2002) says that government methods for gathering and using evidence need extensive reform.

An independent NGO would map the way.

3. General for local

You don't know what schools should do about accrediting careers education, nor do I. And neither does the QCA. These are local decisions, based on local understanding of the factors.

Guidance is an applied field: our job is to work out how to use knowledge. The only place where knowledge can be used is a locality; there is nowhere else. However central-generated, the factors we identify must, then, be locally recognisable.

This is argument number two for complexity: complexity is power. The more inclusive the factors, the fuller the grasp of reality and the more options there are for action. Where complexity has been taken into account, there is always something useful that can be done.

DOTS was a good example. It reviewed salient facts and set them in a comprehensive frame – with a broad sweep. The result is scannable: 'self into opportunity, plus decision, equals transition'. It survived while it was wide enough to take account of pretty-well all the facts, for pretty-well any programme.

Organisation-development theorist Michael Fullan shows how people who are expected to deliver a new programme must be helped to understand both its operation and its rationale. This always requires working with others - on the key local facts, how we must adapt the action, and who is in the best position to do what. It is impossible to manage such a process from a distance. An NGO can usefully frame the factors; the pertinent enquiries will be local.

Academics have been known to look askance at local action research. But we must understand how 'what works' works differently in different localities.

4. Learner interests

In an earlier stab at 'career conversations', Charles Truax and Bob Carkhuff acknowledged that people in helping roles were - on average - no more helpful than just leaving things to take their course. But Charles and Bob were persistent, and disentangled from the data a significant finding: while helpers didn't do much to jack up *average* improvement measures, their efforts did pump up *standard deviations*. And so, for every client significantly lifted up the scale by helpers, another was significantly depressed. Help can harm. Inadvertent damage to clients is not uncommon in personal services (medicos call it 'iatrogenic illness').

Are there any possibilities for collateral damage in contemporary careers work? You bet! And recent trends are among the culprits. It is not that these trends are, in themselves, bad; nor is it that, case by case, the damage is massive. It is that improvement in quality might depend, as much as anything, on bucking the trends – at least to some extent. Some independent-minded careers workers are already bucking - not entirely, but enough to acknowledge the duty of care.

Bucking the trend sometimes means avoiding the most insidious form of 'producer-capture': not cynical exploitation of vulnerable clients, but doing harm, at the very moment we are most strenuously trying to help.

Such issues can only be resolved on the basis of a willingness to examine impact on real lives. Market-driven customer satisfaction surveys will not do this: it needs deeper insights; in particular, it needs a well-founded understanding. Developing that understanding is the only conceivable justification for theory. If theory is any good, it will help us to explain the difference between what we tried to do, and what we actually did. It will also help us to know what to do about this.

Ill-founded understanding can be discarded when political whim no longer needs it. Careers-work commentator Suzy Harris recently repeated Inge Bates's half-forgotten warning: 'Guidance is a malleable concept'!. That means that muscle can easily push it into any shape muscle favours. The need to grapple with commercial and political muscle persuaded Antonio Gramsci of the importance of civil society. Guidance is not exempted from the responsibility.

The trends described above were set in motion at the time of the CBI papers. Policy analyst Kanishka Jayasuriya traces a general policy shift over the same period. It moves from concepts of 'welfare' for clients, to concepts of 'contracts' with clients. But, he argues, all has been made to rest on simplistic ideas about what he calls 'a "privatised" understanding of individual autonomy'. He finds its consequences deeply unfair.

So, when we see this wholly in terms of learner interests, do we?

Independent tactics

The list on page 28 is fourteen items for a strategic NGO agenda. A careers-work NGO should produce a 'briefing' on each of these, and more – much as Greenpeace and Demos do. Both are, in that sense, think-tanks.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

trends require us to work...	*which means we need to know how...*
1 **...with policy-driven funding regimes** - programmes are re-shaped into fundable and, therefore, commercially-significant forms	...to enable cooperation between nominally 'competing' providers and maximise what even 'privatised' providers can offer
2 **...with markets** - commercial relationships are being edged into dealings between providers and learners	...to avoid penalties for more vulnerable learners
3 **...with targets and performance indicators** - accountability measures proliferate	...to deal with possibilities that they do not point to real effectiveness, and resist their arbitrarily shaping our work
4 **...with centrally-generated advice** - policy-founded advice on practice is freely offered	...however over-stretched, to develop deeper, wider and local bases for action
5 **...with change at work** - we respond to the changing demands for skills, flexibility and self reliance	...to help with the impact of change on life-structures, social attachment, personal engagement and on finding meaning
6 **...with lists of behaviours and skills** – such indicators are used as predictors of successful career development	...to question the validity of these predictions, and be alert to the consequences of their use for the commodification of learners
7 **...with choice** – choice has been allowed to become the central concept for guidance	...to take account of differences between (say) 'choice' and 'impulse', and how the formulation of present 'choices' is prejudiced by early experience.
8 **...with computer-assisted guidance** – CAGs is widely urged	...to avoid the premature 'fixing' of career intentions in impressionable learners
9 **...with progress files** – various forms of profiling are used concurrently for learning and selection purposes	...to avoid the consequences of these conflicting agendas for inhibiting learner disclosure
10 **...with work experience** - work experience is frequently treated as a more-or-less self-contained programme	...to position work experience as access to people, places and tasks - in a more completely designed and embedded overall learning programme
11 **...with kite-marking** – quality markers are widely used	...to appreciate that indicators need not mark appropriate and effective help, and to avoid the distortion that can result from their inappropriate use
12 **...with anti-stereotyping** – almost all of our work nods in the direction of fairness concerning gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality and special needs	...to engage the real dynamics of stratification – so that origin does not predict destiny and inter-generation disadvantage is not perpetuated
13 **...with designated outcomes** – QCA-canvassed outcomes are largely content-focussed	...to attend to the processes of career learning – so that they enable transfer-of-learning and learning-to-learn
14 **...with Connexions** - discussions are about resource competition, feared losses to achieving clients, the erosion of past structures, and the impact on helping roles	...to seek ways of effectively organising diverse human and material resources into a locally deliverable programme

Think-tanks are enquiring, analysing and disseminating NGOs. Will Hutton's emergent Work Foundation is an example. Others, like IPPR, have had their independence challenged – on the suspicion that funding makes them too careful about what they say. That's for BONGOs and GRINGOs. The issue of 'who gets to do what in our societies' needs an INdiGO - an 'independent non-government organisation'. The tactics must also be independent, engaging abilities like the best of our academics and journalists.

INdiGOs are originators, Any half-decent workshop 'jockey' can put together an engaging staff-development event - on any agenda. Jockeys ride other people's beasts (or spin other people's discs). INdiGOs don't follow agendas, they set them.

Hence probing enquiry. Any competent 'jobbing' researcher can assemble a methodology for what the client wants to know. An INdiGO formulates the questions.

Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson, at the Work Foundation, fuse academic and journalistic abilities in enquiry, analysis and dissemination. And, in so doing, they exhibit an important NGO quality: media savvy which attracts the interested attention, not only of careers-work 'insiders', but also of society-at-large. In contemporary careers work, that means attracting the interested attention of social, youth, education-welfare and voluntary workers.

And then there is Young Victor. We need the young victors - Peter Benenson's 'ordinary people'; and we need them in action-mode. No think-tank in our field has yet credibly engaged the people whose lives are most affected by the issues of who-gets-to-do-what.

That's why we need a think-tank – to activate civil society with GetUpNGO.

Reading

Kanishka Jayasuriya (2002). 'The new contractualism - neo-liberal or democratic?'. *The Political Quarterly*, 73 (3),
Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2000). 'The ambiguity of NGOs'. *New Left Review*, 2,
Greg Philo and David Miller (2001). *Market Killing - what the Free Market Does and What Social Scientists Can Do About It.* London; Longman,
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Upcoming material

With Kath Wright of Careers Essex, Bill is working on *How to Integrate Connexions and Citizenship with Curriculum.* Further news will appear on the Career-Learning Café Website - www.hihohiho.com.

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NICEC NEWS

About NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) is a network organisation initiated and sponsored by the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC). NICEC's aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research. It conducts applied research and development work, of national and international relevance, related to career education and guidance in educational, work and community settings. Career education and guidance consists of a range of processes designed to help individuals to make informed choices and transitions related to their lifelong progress in learning and in work.

There is a NICEC home page on the CRAC web site: www.crac.org.uk/nicec

Recent publications by NICEC members

Andrews, D. 'Time for Careers Work'. NACGT Journal, February 2003.

Colley, H. (2003). 'The myth of Mentor as a double régime of truth: producing docility and devotion in engagement mentoring with "disaffected" youth', in Satterthwaite, J., Atkinsion, E. & Gale, K. (eds). (2003). *Discourse, Power, Resistance: Challenging the Rhetoric of Contemporary Education*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

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