NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

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Promoting research and reflective practice in career development

NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

NICEC STATEMENT

The Fellows of NICEC agreed the following statement in 2010.

'The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) was originally founded as a research institute in 1975. It now plays the role of a learned society for reflective practitioners in the broad field of career education, career guidance/counselling and career development. This includes individuals whose primary role relates to research, policy, consultancy, scholarship, service delivery or management. NICEC seeks to foster dialogue and innovation between these areas through events, networking, publications and projects.

NICEC is distinctive as a boundary-crossing network devoted to career education and counselling in education, in the workplace, and in the wider community. It seeks to integrate theory and practice in career development, stimulate intellectual diversity and encourage transdisciplinary dialogue. Through these activities, NICEC aims to develop research, inform policy and enhance service delivery.

Membership and fellowship are committed to serious thinking and innovation in career development work. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations connected with career education and counselling. Fellowship is an honour conferred by peer election and signals distinctive contribution to the field and commitment to the development of NICEC's work. Members and Fellows receive the NICEC journal and are invited to participate in all NICEC events.

NICEC does not operate as a professional association or commercial research institute, nor is it organisationally aligned with any specific institution. Although based in the UK, there is a strong international dimension to the work of NICEC and it seeks to support reflective practice in career education and counselling globally.'

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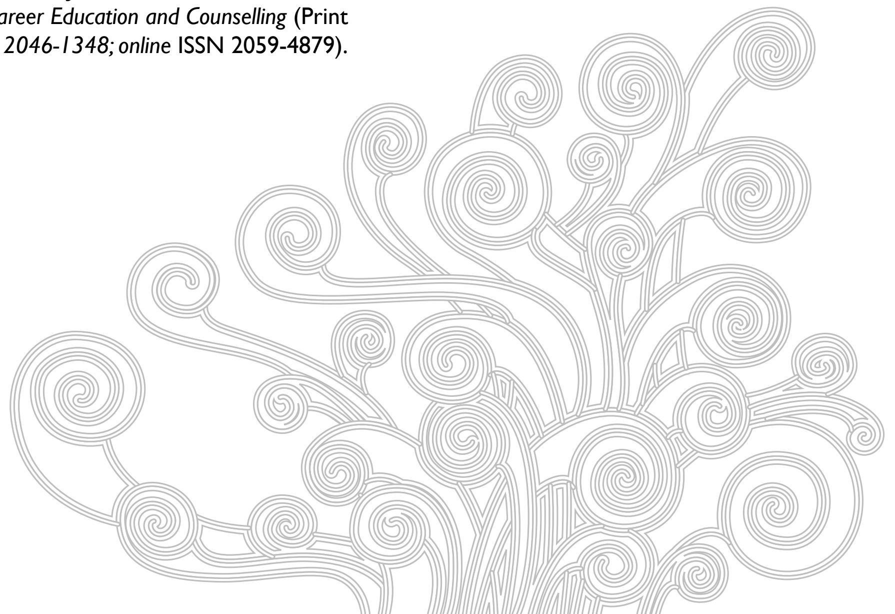
AIMS AND SCOPE

The NICEC journal publishes articles on the broad theme of career development in any context including:

- Career development in the workplace: private and public sector, small, medium and large organisations, private practitioners.
- Career development in education: schools, colleges, universities, adult education, public career services.
- Career development in the community: third age, voluntary, charity, social organisations, independent contexts, public career services.

It is designed to be read by individuals who are involved in career development-related work in a wide range of settings including information, advice, counselling, guidance, advocacy, coaching, mentoring, psychotherapy, education, teaching, training, scholarship, research, consultancy, human resources, management or policy. The journal has a national and international readership.



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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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For information on journal subscription or membership, please contact Wendy Hirsh: membership@nicec.org

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This issue: an 'open call' for papers

Welcome to this issue of the Journal of the National Institute of Career Education and Counselling. Normally the content of the journal revolves around a broad theme of interest to our wide readership, both in the UK and internationally, but for this issue we decided to have an 'open call' for papers. This allows us to attract authors who wish to publish in the journal, but who may struggle to fit their article into a stated theme at a particular point in time. The content for this issue is therefore eclectic, and, although five of the eight articles are focussed on research in a UK context, the discussion and debate will be of interest elsewhere.

The first two articles focus on Higher Education. First, **Wendy Hirsh, Emma Pollard and Jane Artess** report on a major study concerning the changing graduate recruitment practices of UK employers. The work involved in-depth interviews with 76 employers and 30 'stakeholders' in graduate employment, including university careers services. The qualitative data were complemented by analysis of existing quantitative data on graduate employment and a wide-ranging literature review. The article reports on selected findings relevant to career development professionals, including: the challenges for employers of attracting appropriate applicants; employers' generic skill needs and views on employability; the changing reasons and criteria for targeting specific higher education institutions; and employers' increasingly strategic use of work experience in graduate recruitment.

Next, **Jonathan Cole and Tamsin Turner** describe the use of case studies for incorporating a focus on employability in a higher education setting. They discuss how a professional studies module for a class of third-year aerospace engineers, provides insight into industrial challenges while at the same time promoting career development. The module was delivered mainly by industrial speakers and involved practical tasks and workshops. The authors state that a more sustainable employability curriculum now supports students in all four years of the School's three degree programmes, offering a structured development of skills and sector understanding. A notable increase in students obtaining sandwich year placements has also been observed.

The next two articles introduce us to new concepts for the sector. **Bill Law,** always at the forefront of new thinking, reminds us that people are changing the ways they manage career and that careers work cannot afford to miss the opportunity this presents. And that, he states, calls for new thinking for a changing, challenging and crowded world. Seeing career management as a process of 'holding on' and 'letting go' is part of that thinking. Ideas about what is valued and what is not, are set out as a search for new meaning in policy, professionalism and practice. In expanding the careers-work repertoire, the article positions clients and students as agents of change.

Next, **Julia Yates** asks us to consider the role of the unconscious in career decision making – often a neglected area in the concepts and theories that underpin careers work. Like Bill, Julia suggests that the complexity of career paths in the 21st century has led to a rise in the number of career changes in a typical working life. Effective career practitioners, she argues, should have a good understanding of the unconscious processes of career choice. Once considered best ignored, the potency and value of these processes, including 'gut instinct, is now recognised. Drawing from decision theory, cognitive neuroscience and behavioural economics, Julia summarises evidence of the most common and effective decision making strategies used in career choice, and considers the implications for practice.

The fifth article moves us to an international perspective. **Abasiubong Ettang and Anne Chant** report on an illustrative research case study conducted to examine existing career guidance interventions available to two young people in different secondary schools in Nigeria. The aim was to explore their perceptions in terms of the subjective usefulness of those interventions in an educational and labour market context within a growing economy. Analysis

indicated that as well as access to careers guidance being inconsistent, the experience of the participants was that the existing provision was not sufficient to support them to develop an appreciable degree of independence, and the career management skills required to meet the demands of the 21st century labour market in particular, and life in general.

We then move back to the UK and consider career learning in schools in Scotland. **Graham Allan** provides a comprehensive overview of past and present policy development and insight into future policy initiatives. The article reminds us that whilst career education has never been statutory in Scotland, it has nonetheless been subject to the ebb and flow of government policy. At times this has been helpful, generating funding, guidelines and advice. Graham argues, however, that government engagement has also been characterised by short-termism and, often, wasteful repetition. In Scotland, 'by 2015', there will be a model that is underpinned by several new policy initiatives, one which locates learning about life and work within the curriculum, and one which provides more robust quality assurance arrangements. Graham hopes this could be the makings of a concerted national effort to improve career learning, rather than yet another short-term initiative.

The penultimate article is a case study in Further Education in England. **Amy Woolley and Tristram Hooley** explore FE students' prior experiences of career education. Their research draws on and extends the limited literature that exists around career support in further education. They describe how a mixed methods case study was used to explore students' experience of careers work prior to attending college, and then they examine the implications of this for the college's provision of career support. Findings indicate that the majority of students had limited contact with careers workers prior to their arrival at the college and, in instances when they had contact, often had a negative preconception of this contact. The findings are discussed with reference to the college's career education provision and the wider implications for the sector.

Finally, **Claire Johnson and Siobhan Neary** discuss the enhancements to professionalism for the career development sector in England. Much has changed in the career development sector since the launch of the Careers Profession Task Force report, 'Towards a Strong Careers Profession' in 2010 (discussed in a previous issue of the NICEC journal). The report made recommendations for enhancing the professionalism of the career sector including the establishment of an overarching professional body, new qualification levels and common professional standards. The Careers Profession Alliance (CPA) and then the Career Development Institute (CDI), launched in April 2013, have striven to facilitate the sector to be stronger and more cohesive by addressing these recommendations. The article explores what was needed, what has been achieved and the plans for the future.

Before closing this editorial, it is worth highlighting that the journal is now available online – details on how to subscribe are included on page 63.

Hazel Reid, Editor

Changing employer practices in graduate recruitment: implications for career development

Wendy Hirsh, Emma Pollard and Jane Artess

A major study of the changing graduate recruitment practices of UK employers, was conducted during 2014 by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It involved in-depth interviews with 76 employers (diverse by size and sector) and 30 'stakeholders' in graduate employment, including university careers services. The qualitative data were complemented by analysis of existing quantitative data on graduate employment and a wide ranging literature review. This article reports on selected findings relevant to career development professionals, including: the challenges for employers of attracting appropriate applicants; employers' generic skill needs and views on employability; the changing reasons and criteria for targeting specific higher education (HE) institutions; and employers' increasingly strategic use of work experience in graduate recruitment.

Introduction

This article draws on the findings of a large-scale study of the approach to graduate recruitment adopted by employers in the UK and how this has evolved in recent years (Pollard et al, 2015).

The topics covered in the interviews with employers and stakeholders included changing employer demand for graduates; recruitment and selection methods and why they are adopted; the interactions between graduate employers and universities; the role of work experience in recruitment and issues of diversity and social mobility in recruitment, which are of strong interest to BIS. By 'recruitment' we mean the activities that generate of a pool of applicants, as opposed to 'selection' from within this applicant pool. The interviews were transcribed and analysed, using a computer-based tool to identify themes.

In this article we focus on some of the themes from the research, examined mostly from the employer perspective. First we summarise some general features of the employer experience of graduate recruitment and then look at three specific issues: employability skills, university targeting, and work experience. The article finishes with a summary of action areas suggested by the research.

Attracting the right volume and type of applicants

At the time of the interviews in 2014, most of the employers in this study were hoping to increase their recruitment after a long period of economic difficulty and constrained graduate recruitment. The study focused on employers looking specifically for individuals with first or higher degrees (or currently studying for these), coming into their first 'real job'. Although there were plenty of graduates seeking work, the employers interviewed felt that attracting the right volume and type of applicants for their business needs was their single biggest challenge.

EMPLOYERS DESCRIBED THREE TYPICAL SCENARIOS, SOMETIMES EXPERIENCED IN COMBINATION IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THEIR BUSINESS:

- **Specific skill shortages:** Most employers of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates were concerned about shortages of high quality applicants, especially women, even throughout the recession.
- **Too many applicants, not necessarily of the quality required:** Most large employers in this study, had many more applicants than they wanted for the schemes and the jobs that did not require specific subject backgrounds. They wanted fewer, better quality applicants – some recruiters for prestigious entry schemes had not filled all their vacancies.
- **Less visible and too few applicants:** The small firms interviewed tended to find it difficult to be visible to either universities or students and some felt there were negative perceptions about working for a small firm. Some much larger organisations without a strong brand in the graduate recruitment market, or in sectors seen as less glamorous, could also find themselves short of applicants.

Employers were often consciously balancing their recruitment of fresh graduates with graduates with a few years of experience and also those with much more experience. In addition, quite a lot of the employers in this study were increasingly interested in recruiting able young people, especially as apprentices, who are choosing not to go to university. Just as labour market trends show a blurring of the jobs occupied by graduates and non-graduates, so employers seemed to perceive a blurring of the skills, attitudes and potential available in graduate and non-graduate recruits.

Some employers were recruiting into graduate entry or training schemes, but these did not necessarily offer more extensive training or varied career experience than recruitment into a specific job vacancy. However entry schemes were often much more visible to applicants than specific job vacancies, partly because a number of vacancies were filled through a high profile recruitment campaign. Much recruitment activity has moved online which has certainly opened up opportunities for all students. However advertising vacancies online did not necessarily help employers target the specific kinds of students they were looking for.

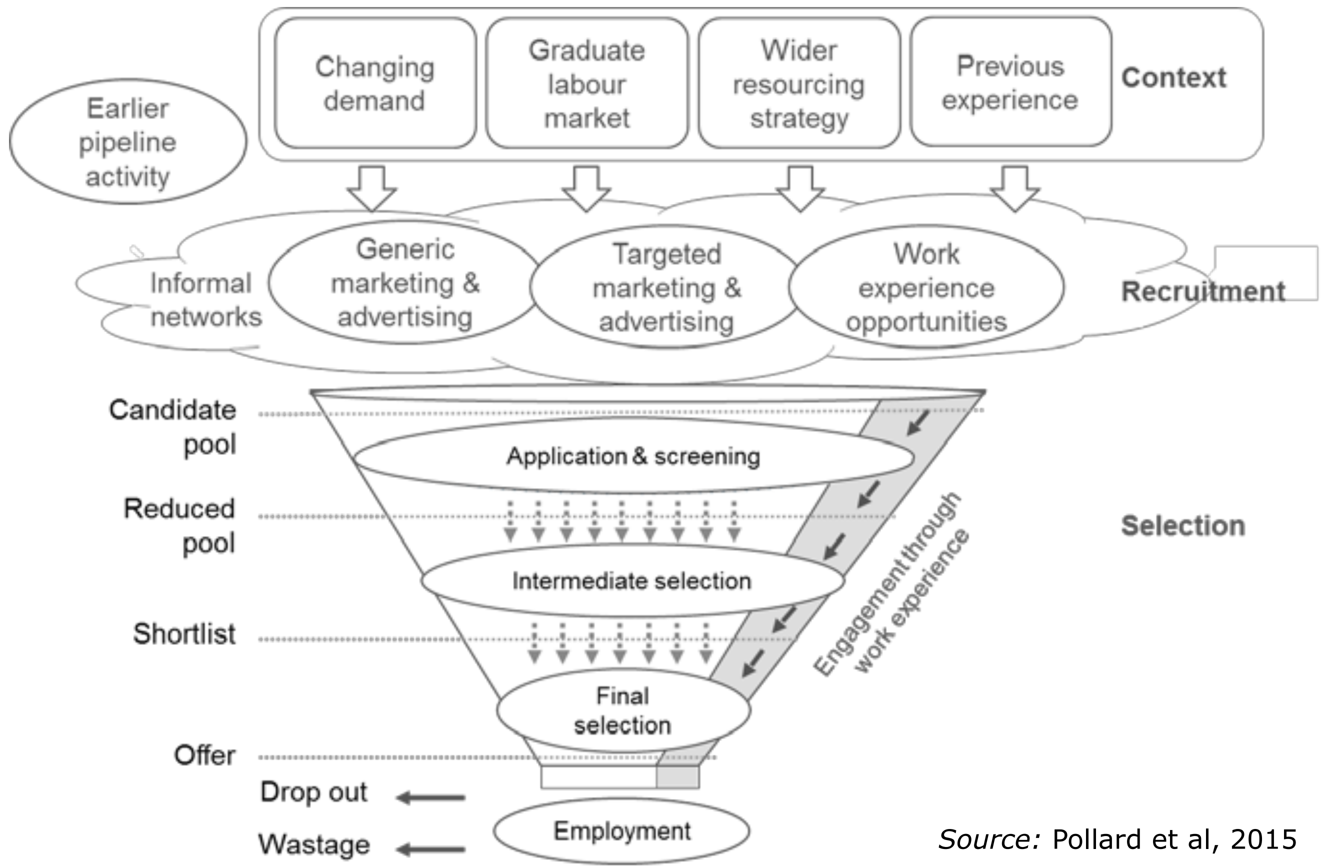
Employers were adopting other strategies to reach appropriate applicants. These included:

- Engaging directly with selected (or targeted) higher education institutions.
- Earlier recruitment and selection for employment, especially at the start of the final year of study, to get ahead other recruiters. A few recruited even in first or second years.
- Using work experience to build relationships with students, especially in their first or second years of study.
- Using social media to target specific types of applicants and keep in touch with them.
- Involving graduate employees who have joined in recent years and/or students who have undertaken work experience as ambassadors for the organisation, for example in university visits or at selection events.

The graduate recruitment and selection funnel

Graduate recruitment, with its multiple selection stages and several routes for attracting applicants, can be pictured as a funnel, as on the diagram below. The most difficult parts of the funnel for employers were getting the right applicants into the candidate pool, as we have seen above, but also the early application and screening stages prior to final selection. It is now often only at the final selection stage that the employer meets applicants face-to-face. As we will describe later, the right hand side of the funnel shows work experience not just as bringing in relevant candidates, but as a selection process, too.

Figure 1. Graduate recruitment and selection funnel



Source: Pollard et al, 2015

Generic and employability skills really do make a difference

Some employers needed graduates with specific knowledge and skills taught only in higher education or who needed a degree to access professional membership. Most did not really differentiate between first and higher degree graduates, except in scientific research and some professions. Most employers in this study did expect graduates to fuel medium term professional and managerial 'talent pipelines', even if they recruited into specific job vacancies.

Whether or not subject-specific knowledge was required, all the employers in this study were looking for a similar set of generic skills and abilities.

Fundamentally, employers sought to recruit graduates because of their perceived intellectual/analytical abilities, their ability to learn quickly, and to bring fresh ideas. These generic cognitive abilities are central to what employers expect from graduates, but they also sought other generic skills and, in particular, positive attitudes to work.

WHAT DID EMPLOYERS MOST OFTEN LOOK FOR IN THEIR GRADUATE RECRUITS?

- Intellectual ability, including the ability to solve problems and to learn quickly.
- Communication and people skills.
- Positive work and commercial attitudes, including an understanding of, and interest in their particular business. This seemed especially important to small firms.
- Flexibility and resilience in the face of change or difficulty.

Most employers emphasised their interest in the totality of what the individual had to offer, not just their qualification or the content of their course. Employers were not very interested in getting more

educational performance information (for example through the Higher Education Achievement Report or HEAR) unless it addressed the skills they were seeking and was available from all universities. Many employers expected to invest considerably in training the graduates they recruited, but this made it even more important to select recruits who would 'fit' the business and be keen to learn.

Although mostly satisfied with the graduates they had hired, many of the employers in this study had serious concerns about the quality of applicants they encountered but did not hire. These concerns focussed on three main areas: inter-personal skills (especially communication); attitudes towards work and workplace behaviour; and career management skills (including researching work opportunities, and how students present themselves in applications and interviews). Some employers observed that students in some universities were much better prepared for job search, application and selection than others. This is clearly a way in which an institution can improve the work prospects for their own students.

Employability in terms of this broad set of generic skills, attitudes and the ability to interact effectively with employers also seems to impact on demand. Some employers had left vacancies unfilled for prestigious entry schemes in 2014, even though they had many thousands of applicants, because too few passed their appropriately stringent selection processes. On the other hand, positive experiences of graduates performing well in the workplace, or of the contribution made by placement students or interns, had often led employers – including small firms – to create new positions and so increase graduate demand.

'Targeting' selected universities: horses for courses

As online recruitment processes have become the norm, targeting particular universities or departments no longer means that employers only attract applicants from a small number of institutions, or use such a list in shortlisting. However, most large employers in the study had direct contact with at least some universities in order to: attract suitable candidates (including for work experience); raise their profile as a graduate employer; project their 'employer brand' and engage with students directly. Targeted institutions often accounted for a significant proportion of both applicants and selected graduate entrants. Even large employers did not have the resources to visit all institutions and so invested time and effort in those they assessed most likely to result in successful recruitment outcomes.

Some employers focused mostly on 'elite' or high entry tariff institutions but this was not pervasive. Others selected institutions to engage with or visit because of their subject strengths, location, previous positive recruitment outcomes and more diverse student populations. Individual employers often selected a basket of institutions reflecting several of these factors. Between them, the employers in this study targeted a large number and wide range of institutions in many locations and with very varied student populations.

Both employers and universities realised the benefits of closer engagement, but both sides were short of resources to engage as broadly and deeply as they might wish. This could lead to innovative behaviour such as creating a virtual careers fair using social media to provide a campus presence to answer questions and give advice. Some small firms had real difficulty in finding a way into relevant student populations and felt universities were not very interested in them. Other small employers, especially in high tech or science-based industries, formed close links with a small number of institutions – sometimes internationally – at departmental level or with key individuals within faculties or schools.

Work experience as an important component of recruitment strategy

Work experience was of high and growing interest to employers of all sizes and for a range of reasons, including: skill and attitude development; the chance to make earlier relationships with potential recruits; an extended opportunity to assess individuals. Not all

employers expressed a demand for work experience in their selection criteria, partly on diversity grounds, but nearly all believed that work experience helps graduates develop the skills they require and so leads to improved performance both in selection and at work. Work experience was seen as especially useful in developing personal maturity and business or commercial understanding. In some sectors, work experience has become an important signal of serious career interest. Many employers were interested in all aspects of wider life and work experience, including voluntary work and other activities taken on at university.

Work experience as defined in the research study included a short placement during study or in vacations (typically of 6 to 12 weeks); a longer sandwich experience (typically 6 or 12 months) or an internship after graduation. Terminology is not standardised, so for example summer placements were sometimes referred to as internships. Entry to work experience opportunities was often through rigorous selection processes, similar to those used for permanent graduate hiring. So those completing a period of work experience had often had a modified selection process if they wished to join the organisation in a more permanent role and the employer wanted to encourage them to do so. Most employers paid for all but very short periods of work experience, albeit often at relatively low rates. In some sectors there was an increase in the use of very short work tasters, insight or shadowing opportunities, often aimed at pre-higher education students or those in the first year of study to support/encourage career choices.

Although work experience early in HE study clearly has great advantages for both students and employers, it works best for students who know what they want to do rather early. Too heavy a focus on this route into employment will disadvantage students who make later career decisions and may cause employers to miss out on some excellent candidates who develop both their skills and their ideas about work later on in their studies or who wish to start exploring work options after graduation. There are also risks for students whose social networks or universities do not alert them to the possible importance of early employer contact in some sectors or occupations; or who have to maximise their ability to earn money in university vacations. Internships after graduation provided additional opportunities but were perhaps less strategically used by employers and less structured than placement schemes during study.

Implications for action

The study highlighted a range of themes, only some of which are covered in this article. Action areas were identified for the different players in graduate recruitment: employers, students, universities and policy-makers. The implications for the first three of these groups are shown in summary form on the table below and can be seen more fully along with implications for policy-makers in the research report (Pollard et al, 2015).

Competing drivers influence employer practices

Threading through the practices and the trends noted above, we can see some of the deeper drivers behind employer behaviour. These need to be understood by students and universities and include:

- A central concern to recruit graduates who will meet evolving business needs as part of a wider resourcing strategy. Recruiting 'the best' means the best for that particular context and the specific jobs and locations where graduates will work.
- Adopting generally open, objective (or meritocratic) and valid selection practices, but only supported in a minority of employers by robust evaluation.
- The need to show cost efficient and effective ways of achieving the desired recruitment outcomes.
- Responding to perceived labour market conditions, especially an excess of applications or skill shortages and the behaviour of their recruitment competitors.
- A general inclination to support young people in their transition to employment, balanced with the need for that transition also to be manageable for the business.
- Workforce diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability is an established part of recruitment thinking in many organisations, but social mobility was a significant driver in relatively few of the employers in this study.

Figure 2. Summary of implications for action

Action by Employers	Action by Students	Action by Universities
Understanding entry routes and the transition into work		
Explaining entry options and helping applicants to find the type of entry that may suit them best. Supporting graduate recruits on entry and developing the potential of those who do not enter via structured schemes or programmes.	Developing search strategies beyond high profile entry schemes. Understanding how to progress their skills and career once at work.	Helping students understand the full range of labour market options and identify types of entry route that may suit them best.
Generic and employability skills		
Articulating the holistic nature of their requirements and which generic skills and attitudes they value most highly. Supporting interview and test practice and giving more informative feedback to unsuccessful applicants.	Becoming fully aware of the importance of inter-personal skills and positive attitudes to work. Developing effective approaches to job search and presenting themselves to employers.	Further strengthening active development of generic skills and employability within the curriculum. Sustaining effective career development support.
Work experience		
Developing structured opportunities for work experience after graduation as well as during study. More small firms might benefit from intermediaries who work with universities and companies to facilitate work experience.	Understanding strategies for seeking work experience during study or on graduation, especially if taking later decisions about work. Appreciating employers' continuing interest in wider life and university experiences.	Alerting students to opportunities for work experience during study, integrated into courses where appropriate. Increasing work experience opportunities through collaboration between universities, and with employer bodies and intermediaries.
Attracting the right applicants and engaging with selected universities		
Extending promotion of STEM subjects in schools to involve more small employers. Considering a range of criteria in deciding which institutions/ courses to target for graduate recruitment and where to form closer links. Engaging students in useful career learning while visiting universities.	Focusing on those employers likely to be interested in them. Making effective use of employer visits or interventions at their institution.	Forming positive, multi-level partnerships with employing organisations well suited to their students. Advising and helping employers to reach students e.g. through clear contact points for small firms and into departments.
Fair and objective screening and shortlisting		
Evaluating screening and shortlisting processes to establish the most appropriate criteria and methods. Being aware that screening on class of degree or A level grades may not be a reliable indicator of quality.	Researching the employer and their selection process, especially any tests used in early stages of selection. Working on higher level numeracy and literacy skills.	Working with students on the early stages of the selection process, especially improving written English and numeracy. Informing students about changing selection practices.
Social mobility		
Understanding how approaches to graduate recruitment, including entry routes, sponsorship, targeting institutions and selection for work experience; can influence the social mix of recruits. Considering the business case for social mobility within wider diversity agendas.	Developing the ability to resist stereotyping of work choices based on background or other factors. Developing a realistic understanding of their own interests and abilities.	Strengthening employability skills of all students, and access to employers, especially through work experience. Using alumni to support students from varied backgrounds.

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Developing employability within a university engineering curriculum

Jonathan Cole and Tamsin Turner

This article provides case studies for incorporating employability in a higher education setting. A professional studies module for a small class (30 students) of third-year aerospace engineers gave insight into industrial challenges while promoting career development. It was delivered mainly by industrial speakers and involved practical tasks and workshops. A more sustainable employability curriculum now supports students in all four years of the School's three degree programmes, offering a structured development of skills and sector understanding. A notable increase in students obtaining sandwich year placements has been observed.

Introduction

In the UK, the Engineering Council is the regulatory body for the engineering profession (www.engc.org.uk). It sets standards of professional competence and licenses engineering institutions, such as the Royal Aeronautical Society or Institution of Mechanical Engineers, to accredit degrees to the Engineering Council standards, the UK-SPEC (www.engc.org.uk/professional-registration/standards/uk-spec). Competence is required in various areas including applying theoretical and practical methods to the analysis and solution of engineering problems, providing technical and commercial leadership, and demonstrating effective interpersonal skills. Accredited engineering degrees have learning outcomes related to the UK-SPEC standards of competence. General learning outcomes such as group working, appreciation of economic and commercial considerations, problem solving and understanding of underpinning science and maths are clearly relevant to the graduate attributes desired by employers (Shearman and Seddon, 2011). Thus, the UK-SPEC provides a framework to help universities prepare students for employment in terms of both technical knowledge and skills.

Cranmer (2006) presents six different methods of incorporating employability skills in the higher education curriculum. These range from total embedding of skills (the skills are present and in context but students might not be aware that they are developing them) to parallel development (separate from the main academic curriculum and with limited contextualisation) with some variations in between. An embedded approach was believed to be more effective.

The importance of students being aware of the purpose of each learning activity in developing skills was also highlighted in a report on pedagogy for employability (Pegg et al, 2012). This would enable students to describe their personal development more clearly. Integrating employability into the core academic curriculum was recommended, with assessment through realistic tasks relevant to the discipline, and active or experiential learning would successfully promote exploration, reflection and engagement. The report states that while genuine work experience is a strong factor in contextualising learning, enhancing employability through work experience is strengthened by reflection, evaluation and expression of the learning achieved.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) (2008) reported a lack of convincing evidence for some pedagogical approaches deemed effective. However, themes for best practice included work-based, active learning with an authentic context (problem solving or project), reflection on learning experience, collaboration with peers or other stakeholders, and employer involvement in the design and delivery of the curriculum.

Harvey and Bowers-Brown (2004) are concerned that, in developing employability, too much attention will be given to developing work skills in the sense of training for employment. They argue that the focus should be on nurturing critical, reflective practitioners who are capable of ongoing development during their careers. A similar theme is outlined by Cox and King (2006) who interviewed employers to ascertain what skills they considered necessary for student employability. In addition to recommending certain skills, the employers desired a depth of understanding and this idea was represented by three layers – theory, tools and application. The paper states that, from an employer's perspective, employability means that 'a person possesses the capability to acquire the skills to do the required work, not necessarily that they can do the work immediately and without further training' (Cox and King, 2006: 263).

The current article reviews the integration of employability skills within the undergraduate engineering curriculum in our School. It begins by describing a professional studies module which was developed over 10 years for aerospace engineering students, before being discontinued due to the need to teach an increasing number of students more efficiently. The article then describes the revamped employability programme which was designed for all second-year students across the School's three degree programmes – mechanical, aerospace and product design engineering. Thus, the article provides case studies for incorporating employability and career development in a higher education setting.

Aerospace Professional Studies

This module, worth 10 CATS points, was compulsory for third-year aerospace engineering students; about half were in their final year (BEng programme) and half were in their penultimate year (MEng programme). It occurred at an appropriate time for job applications – typically, there was a two-hour lecture slot each week for 10 weeks during the autumn semester. The module provided a balance between professional engineering (examples of current industrial challenges) and professional development (skills, career preparation). Significantly, it was delivered mainly by industrial speakers who brought various interesting perspectives. Active learning was encouraged and constructive interaction occurred between students and speakers.

The module had developed since 2002/03 following much consultation with and encouragement from the university careers adviser responsible for engineering. The objectives of better informing the students regarding the aerospace sector and developing effective presentation, commercial awareness and career management skills were very relevant. In a CBI survey (2008), 86 per cent of CEOs ranked employability skills as the most important consideration when recruiting graduates. Furthermore, in June 2010, the universities minister highlighted 'employability statements', requiring universities to consider what they 'offer students to help them become job-ready in the widest sense' (Willetts, 2010).

In order to fulfil the objectives in a stimulating, up-to-date way, the material was presented mainly by people working at the forefront of engineering, with exciting stories and videos. The range of speakers illustrated the range of career opportunities. Various perspectives, from director to recent graduate, were included. Various organisations, from international to small enterprise, participated. A non-aerospace company representative demonstrated transferability of skills. Having graduates of our university, and some relatively young speakers, encouraged empathy between speakers and students.

Particular aspects of the module in its final year of operation (2011/12) are now summarised. A director from Thales, a defence company, discussed recent projects and showed that an engineer's technical skills are not sufficient when working in industry. Awareness of commercial and strategic challenges is also vital. A visit to B/E Aerospace, the world's leading manufacturer of aircraft seats, gave students a unique insight into industrial practice and a connection to other topics from their degree including manufacturing, composite materials and lean engineering. The factory tour was followed by an assessment centre exercise where the students tackled a realistic problem in teams before presenting their solution to B/E engineers. A British Airways captain gave a fascinating overview of his job, described how engineers contribute to commercial aviation and advised those

interested in pilot training. Through listening to cockpit and air traffic control recordings, and discussing recent air accidents, important aspects of teamwork were highlighted. Two visitors from Airbus, another global leader, gave a workshop on teamwork. Some students worked in groups on a given realistic problem and others observed, aiming to identify characteristics of a successful team, so important in industry. Two employees of Accenture gave a class on interview skills in which student participation – interviewing each other – was prominent. The company representatives were aerospace graduates of our university in 2010 and therefore very familiar with the students' circumstances. At Accenture, they noticed that graduates from Northern Ireland seemed less confident. This underlines the need to show students that they possess many relevant skills which enhance their employability.

Each year's programme was slightly different. Previous speakers included a self-employed builder of flight simulators and an aerospace engineering graduate working for Unilever, a company not associated with aerospace. This talk was useful for those who do not necessarily want to work in the aerospace field. The students were shown that they have many skills which are valued and applicable in other areas of engineering. The involvement of employers in the delivery of the module and the active learning aspects are examples of good practice (UKCES, 2008; Pegg et al, 2012).

Assessment

Assessment was entirely by coursework which was designed to be relevant. Students had to write an executive summary based on the commercial awareness lecture to test their understanding of how engineers were successfully involved in developing a local, high-tech engineering business. Following the pilot's lecture, they had to plan and report on an imaginary aid flight mission to Africa; this involved aircraft load calculations and consideration of aircraft performance at different altitudes and temperatures. They also had to prepare a CV and give two group presentations. Students received written, individual feedback on their summary and a corrected/improved CV was returned. For their first presentation, students assessed their peers formatively. This required them to observe actively and identify good/bad presentation techniques. The assessment, as well as the presentation, was performed in groups. The comments were quickly returned to the presenters allowing them to focus on improving before their second presentation. The presentation topics had an aerospace theme. For example, for their second presentation, students chose an aerospace company and reported on its structure, products and recruitment procedures. Therefore they became familiar with many potential employers while enhancing presentation skills.

The use of practical tasks for the assessment and during the sessions (for example, the problem solving exercise during the factory visit), plus the collaborative nature of the tasks, have been highlighted as effective practice (UKCES, 2008; Pegg et al, 2012). Overall, the module fits the category described as 'bolt-on generic skills' (Cranmer, 2006: 172) in which skills are visible, in context and assessed explicitly and which is believed to have a high impact on the curriculum.

Impact and feedback

Good attendance at the classes was normal, averaging 85 per cent over 10 years. Student feedback indicated they appreciated the relevance of the module, enjoyed the speakers and gained confidence. This is illustrated by the following student comments.

- 'Motivates me to do well.'
- The pilot's 'lectures were inspiring'.
- 'Was positive to see employees from such highly regarded companies taking time out to visit.'
- 'The assignments had a real life application and purpose and this made more enjoyable to complete.'
- 'Helps the student understand how useful his degree is.'

Quantifying the impact of the module on the students' learning is difficult but it was observed that, during this period, sandwich year work placements for the aerospace students were much more common after third rather than second year. The module was possibly an important motivating factor here. Note that the

sandwich version of an undergraduate degree includes a year of relevant work experience at some point after second year and before final year.

The ongoing support of enthusiastic speakers was significant. Most participated eagerly year after year. The British Airways captain noted the students' 'tremendous enthusiasm' which 'was reflected in their attitude towards myself and in the way they received the lectures'. An engineer from B/E Aerospace was keen to 'leave a lasting impression' to encourage future applications to his company.

The module featured in a report (Foskett and Johnston, 2006) on credit-bearing careers education and could easily be adapted by others. However, a review of education provision within our School, while being mindful of the need to teach an increasing number of students efficiently, led to a common suite of professional studies modules provided across the three degree programmes (mechanical, aerospace and product design engineering) and the discontinuing of Aerospace Professional Studies. The main focus for employability within the curriculum was now aimed at second-year students and the next section of this article describes the revamped employability programme.

Employability Programme

In April 2012, and with the need for a systemic and sustainable intervention of the employability curriculum, a School-based placement officer was appointed to manage and monitor placement learning and to deliver the employability programme. Clearly the aerospace programme was of significant value to the approximately 30 students on the course each year. The challenge of the School-wide programme was to provide a comparable experience but with over 200 students in each class. This has been achieved in the main and feedback, both immediate (module evaluation) and longer term (student placement portfolio acknowledgments), has been positive from students, staff, industry and the professional bodies' accreditation panel.

The employability programme in 2012/13 comprised 12 two-hour sessions on Wednesday afternoons which were filmed for students to review subsequently. As Wednesday afternoons are traditionally free for clubs, societies and sports, the scheduling of the programme might have given students the impression it was not a high priority for the School. Session topics included:

- **Skills in the workplace** – information about the key skills employers seek in an engineering graduate as informed by the CIHE employability skills profiles (Archer and Davison, 2008).
- **Making applications and CVs** – students were provided with key principles for building a good CV and then asked to review each other's and give feedback.
- **Assessment centres** – interactive session delivered by key engineering recruiter, Jaguar Land Rover.
- **Team work** – consideration of team roles and completion of a self-perception questionnaire.
- **Interview skills** – session delivered by Accenture focusing on the principles of effective interview techniques.
- **Career options** – provided students with a sector overview informed by our graduates' destinations and graduate labour market intelligence.
- **Going global** – information session underpinned by the 'Global Graduates into Global Leaders' publication (Diamond et al, 2011).
- **Optimising your learning experience through reflection** – this focused on the practice of reflection (Little, 1998; Pegg et al, 2012).

The module is not credit-bearing but appears on the students' transcripts as 'pass' or 'fail' based on attendance – a pass requires attending a minimum of nine of the 12 sessions.

All students have the option to undertake a placement year during their degree. Much effort is directed towards encouraging this given the belief that many desirable employability skills 'can only be learned in 'real life' employment situations, even on a temporary basis such as work placements' (Johnson and Burden, 2003: 39). Since the placement officer

was delivering the employability programme, it was deemed appropriate that it became the vehicle for placement preparation initially. However it was clear that preparing students to understand the importance of placements at the very time the placement vacancies were being advertised was leaving it too late. From these initial reflections a wider employability programme was conceived.

The expanded programme

In the current year (2014/15), a range of career development opportunities has been provided across all stages of the degree programmes with significant industrial input and support from the university's careers service. This aims to promote a progressive growth of self-awareness, knowledge, skills and understanding of the graduate labour market and give students an ideal platform for their career development.

First-year students were provided with a series of sessions in the first semester that required them to articulate their motivation for studying engineering, understand the skills engineering employers seek, conduct a skills audit and become more aware of summer work experience opportunities and the importance of starting to develop an employability profile. The onus at this stage is to ensure students have the opportunity to understand their options and gain summer work experience as a platform for skill development. The Sentinus programme, PwC and the Royal Naval Reserves all offer such opportunities so were included as session contributors. To prompt students to evaluate their current level of skills and attributes, they were asked to submit a 300-word statement as if applying for a summer vacancy. This formed the basis of each student's personal development planning interview with their personal tutor.

The second-year students were all enrolled on the employability module (as described previously) which still focuses on preparing for the sandwich year placement. The module is now timetabled within teaching time on a Monday afternoon as a result of pressure from the students and the pass rate this year (based on attendance) was 96 per cent (average weekly attendance of 180 students), a large improvement on the 2012/13 pass rate of 75 per cent. With the introduction of the first-year sessions, a lot of the ground work including understanding employers' skill criteria, understanding personal skill development and building a CV are in place. Therefore, module content has been adjusted and augmented by sessions on digital citizenship, international options, psychometric testing (interactive tests were provided in the session), assessment centres and situational judgement testing. An additional session was converted into a speed networking event in which 12 local employers interacted with students to their mutual benefit. Employer comments included support for the freshness of the format, 'something a little different to get students engaged'. Also, students could book to attend a tutorial-style seminar focusing on interview skill techniques co-hosted by the School's placement officer and a different company each week. The inception of this activity and the speed networking event were driven by feedback from employers who felt our students were strong on paper but lacked interview and interpersonal skills.

Since the placement year is optional, there is an emphasis on engagement, understanding and encouragement to assist students to take this option. Given that students are influenced by each other and, with placement being such an individual activity, finding a mechanism for them to feel as a group is important. The educational software, TurningPoint, has been applied successfully; it provides students with an anonymous means of voting as a group to contribute to a group understanding (Blasco-Arcas et al, 2013; Donohue, 2014). For example, the software was used to collate students' views on the main benefits of undertaking a placement, thus providing them with a variety of opinions and aiding the marketing of the placement option. The numbers of students undertaking the placement year has increased as follows: 54 in 2011/12, 71 in 2012/13, 80 in 2013/14 and 106 in 2014/15. This growth is believed to be mainly due to the second-year employability module. The full impact of these numbers on the proportion of sandwich degrees is not yet realised but Figure 1 shows the strong upward trend.

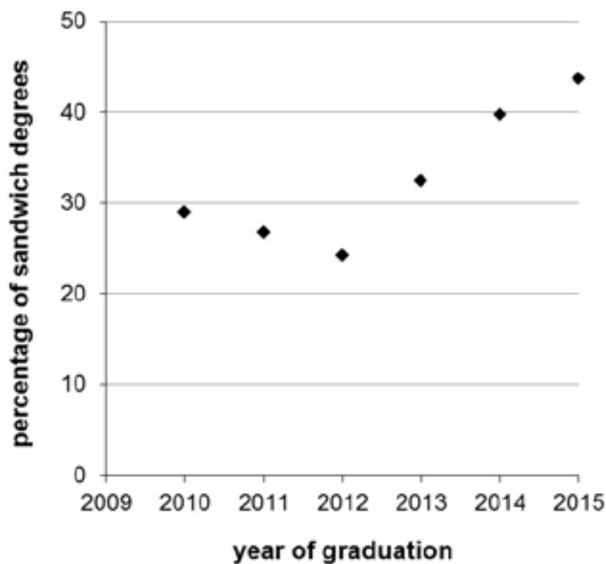

Figure 1.
Proportion of mechanical, aerospace and product design engineering graduates on the sandwich degree programme.

Several of the sessions within the first and second-year programmes – most notably, the skills audit – require students to learn actively about themselves through reflection. This approach is continued when students are on placement as a means of benchmarking their skills before, during and after placement. The process of reflection in an experiential learning context is highlighted and broken down into the key areas of learning: act, reflect, conceptualise and apply (Kolb, 1984). The second-year session involves students at the 'act' and 'reflect' points of the cycle. When on placement, students are required to complete the cycle for key skill areas including managing tasks, communicating effectively, working with and relating to others, and applying initiative to solve problems. Through keeping monthly diaries and compiling a portfolio, students have a structure to aid this process, as endorsed by Little (1998). The diaries help to document the 'act' and 'reflect' points. Students then must 'conceptualise' by determining the skills they have developed in undertaking the tasks. Articulating their objectives for improving their knowledge and skills constitutes the 'apply' phase of the cycle. Thus, students on placement are expected to be critically and continuously evaluating their skills and experience. Submission of a satisfactory portfolio at the end of the placement year is necessary to fulfil the academic requirements of the sandwich year. The portfolio is assessed on a pass/fail basis and counts for 120 CATS points.

In third and fourth year, graduating students are offered 10 one-hour (optional) sessions focused on the graduate labour market and delivered partly by industrial speakers. Session topics include professional registration, postgraduate study options, lean manufacturing techniques, project management and leadership. Development of the employability programme is ongoing with the inclusion of entrepreneurial activities being considered while peer mentoring could be adopted by third and fourth-year students supporting first and second-year students with placement applications.

Conclusions

The Aerospace Professional Studies module involved career learning, employability and skills integrated into an effective learning experience for third-year aerospace engineering undergraduates. Industrial speakers participated keenly and practical tasks were used for the assessment and during workshops. Students enjoyed the module and appreciated its relevance.

With a sustainable approach to the employability curriculum needed, a School-wide programme has been developed. It is subject-specific, focused on relevant sector areas (engineering) through significant engagement with employers of various sizes. It provides support for students in all four years of the degree programmes, thereby offering a step-by-step, progressive build-up of knowledge, self-awareness, skills development and sector understanding to ensure they are ready for the graduate labour market. It uses central university services alongside industrial expertise to help deliver the topics. Within the School, it would be impossible to provide the range and number of sessions currently offered. This has had the added benefit of highlighting central services to students; indeed, during the first semester of 2014/15, the proportion of students from the School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering booking a career guidance appointment was at least twice that for any other school in the university. One clear

positive impact of the programme is the increased number of students doing a placement year.

Of course, the programmes described here do not represent the only opportunities for students to develop employability skills – there are many examples of practical, analytical, computational, presentation, team-working and research skills embedded over the curriculum within academic modules.

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Career trajectories for holding on and letting go

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People are changing the ways they manage career. Careers work cannot afford to miss the opportunity this presents. And that calls for new thinking for a changing, challenging and crowded world. Seeing career management as a process of 'holding on' and 'letting go' is part of that thinking. It speaks of thoughts and feelings about what is and is not valued. The thinking is set out here as a search for new meaning in policy, professionalism and practice[1]. It radically expands the careers-work repertoire. More importantly it positions clients and students as agents of change.

Introduction

Ideas concerning holding on and letting go first appear in narrative thinking (Law, 2012a). That thinking poses questions about how and why a person might need to 'hold on' to friends that matter, to assumptions that feel right, and to privileges that stand a person in good stead. And it implies a need sometimes to 'let go' of friends, assumptions and privileges that restrain a person. This article examines those dynamics in contemporary career management. The examination finds five areas of development…

connection	drawing on links to experience and people
reach	developing ready-for-anything flexibility
buoyancy	making good use of bad news
grasp	intersecting learning with life-long living
progress	releasing people from arbitrary holds on how they live

1 A fuller, illustrated and digitally-linked account of this thinking is freely available at http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/9272

Connection

Tracking connections is necessary to finding meaning in what would otherwise be a meaningless jumble. It looks for links which have value, which might and which don't. So the exhortation 'only connect' needs predicating – 'connected to whom?', 'for what?', and 'why?'. These ask about who and what influences action. There is a long list of answers, linking to family, friends and contacts. They can connect to neighbourhoods, communities and local agencies. Retailers, advertisers, fashion and off- and on-line media can be influences. And there are reasons for accepting and rejecting politics, campaigns and demonstrations. Such links frame questions about what to hold-onto and what to let-go. The answers speak of what people can give their lives to, sometimes as agents of change.

Professional thinking (Law, 2011a) has set out a spectrum of links that clients and students must deal with, and can live by.

There are starting points linking to what everybody more-or-less knows about career…

- people act on '**instinct**' – impulsively looking for immediate pay-offs
- they are most aware of their '**individuality**' – at the extreme as though in a social vacuum
- but action can be '**situated**' – so that what people do reflects where they live
- and part of that is in their '**background**' – where people learn from others how to manage who they are

No big surprises so far, but there's more to say about the dynamics of social settings…

- people are located as a members of a '**community**' – with its agreed way of doing things

- this is also where '**attachments**' are forged – shaping loyalties, give-and-take allegiances, and aspirations
- and each locality nurtures a '**culture**' – with its shared beliefs, values and expectations
- so that social '**enclaves**' are formed – each with its distinctive range of sympathies, tolerance, exclusions and hostilities
- the dynamics of such social life is '**habitus**' – where the inhabited culture shapes habits of mind

There are influences, less documented in career thinking, which connect to the political…

- social '**polarisation**' building over time, separates people into like and not like 'us', the valued and the disdained, 'workers and shirkers'
- by contrast a '**nudge**' is immediate – reinforcing behaviour which maintains the influence of markets, shareholders, schooling and employers
- while **stakeholding** is deeper – more than shareholding – it represents the rights and interests of customers, citizens, students and workers
- among the '**interests**' – are beliefs in the certain deserving of one's own success, and the probable deserving of other people's failure
- more inclusive interests voice '**identity politics**' – opposing gender, race and sexuality discrimination and, less so, snobbery

Increasingly cited accounts of influence on career management call on a wide range of links…

- influences are defended in '**political theory**' – voicing beliefs, interests and evidence ranging from economic necessity to planetary survival
- people are increasingly asked to show '**resilience**' – seen as a 'good' upbringing building character
- and **intuitions** are not lightly to be dismissed – our brains know more than we know they know, and their urging is sometimes worth heeding
- but ideas of '**enlightenment**' are harder-edged – opposing entrenched interests, urging independence of mind and expecting to be taken seriously in education
- enlightenment also signposts '**critical thinking**' – which undermines arbitrary controls in favour of reliably-informed progress
- and '**creativity**' takes a similar stance – refusing to settle for how things are as invention reshapes and reconnects everything

There's some complexity in these connections. Claims for stakeholding are politically contested (Mount, 2015). And there are contests between different interests (Law, 2011b) and different philosophies (Stephen Law, 2015). Either way, polarisation thwarts reforming zeal in all but a brave minority (Sunstein, 2014). So independence of mind calls on courage (Taylor, 2014). And political courage is rooted in community culture as much as in family upbringing (Oliner, 1992).

Professional thinking constantly progresses. Understanding of social influences on career management is expanding (Law, 2009a). An emerging feature is how students learn from each other (Easton, 2014). Such social sharing points to possibilities for peer-to-peer conversations. Tests of effectiveness would be enabling a person to explain to herself how she manages her life, to give voice to why a person's children are so precious to him, to widen a ready-for-anything repertoire for dealing with change. And these would be holding-on-or-letting-go outcomes.

Linking to politics. Talk of work, aspiration and stakeholding is talk of politics. A framework to decipher the links between politics and action is based on three key elements (Jones, 2014). Any currently dominant group pursuing its interests is (1) the 'establishment'. It links to (2) 'outriders' – research-and-development outfits strengthening establishment impact by capturing and linking to new connections. Careers-work outfits do it (Law, 2015a). All this positioning needs (3) to connect with what people can recognise and accept. And that framework, named after its inventor, is the 'Overton window'. All politics aligns to the three elements.

And, if politicians can learn to do it, why not other agents of change – such as educators and students? Students and their educators have never so much needed independently to scrutinise what politicians propose for education. And there is an expanding range of connections to draw on (Hattie, 2009). There is also a world-wide hunger for enabling citizens proactively to engage with the politics of education (Kempne and Loureiro Jurema, 2002).

Reach

The Overton window of conventional careers work frames a free-standing client, making economic moves, based on impartial information from expert advisers (Law, 2013a). But emerging reports speak of unmanageable demands on work-life balance (Law, 2006a), of increasing demands of education (Law, 2014a), concerned less about self-advancement and more about meaningful lives (Mayseless and Kere, 2014). Careers work needs a bigger window.

Troublesome thoughts. The free-standing client is thought of as making choices and coming to decisions (Law, 2008a). But emerging evidence is outdating that thinking. It speaks of an individual 'self' entwined in self-contradicting (Law, 2012a) and self-serving (Law, 2011a) delusion. It exposes over-confidence, comfortable confidence and misplaced confidence. By contrast, the processes of 'holding-and-letting' allow people to be less sure of themselves – willing to be troubled by surprise, confusion and indecision. And this would be what makes new thinking possible – relying less on what experts know, and more on what students discover. It would expand the possibilities for ready-for-anything flexibility.

Troublesome affect. A hold-and-let conversation conjures thoughts and feelings. And clinical evidence (Law, 2001) points to a repertoire of affect in career-management…

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immediate and impulsive reaction
suddenly welling-up emotions
settled feelings about the way things are

They have been lumped together as 'emotional intelligence'. But further research (Law, 2006a) maps a deeper and wider account of affective dynamics. And it feeds into what is thought to make for career-management success (Law, 2013b). Some of that affect is usefully troublesome.

Professional thinking (Law, 2011a) has set out a three-fold account of career-management affect.

There is a long-standing argument for positive thinking…

- self-esteem – widely thought to be necessary to any achievement
- **confidence** – said to be needed for risk-taking
- **ambition** – held to be made possible by both

More recent thinking is not so much upbeat as astringent…

- **self-regulation** – appeals for a disciplined state-of-mind
- **character** – deals with difficulties and obstacles
- **resilience** – a bouncing-back response to loss or failure
- **mindfulness** – a special focus on here-and-now reality

Some thinking looks to becoming an agent of change...

- **independence-of-mind** – interrogating arbitrary influences
- **creativity** – transforming how people see reality and their part in it
- **critical-thinking** – an unwillingness to settle for the way things are

The thinking considers, by stages, what feels good, what demands attention and what is transformative. They are elements in a narrative recounting one thing leading to another. The evidence is that humanity makes more useful sense of a narrative than a list (Law, 2012a). A more detailed collation of evidence (Law, 2012b) shows how a 'rounded' story has episodes where nothing is quite what is claimed, nobody is entirely in control and little is reliably predictable.

The puzzlement draws people into a process of figuring out what is going on. By beckoning people into the habit of taking nothing for granted it calls on the independence of mind, the creative change agency and the critical thinking that can be ready for anything. There are cases for reform concerning precarious employment (Standing, 2011), arbitrary religious demands (Hirsi Ali, 2015), neglected child care (McVeigh, 2014) and stress-related anxiety (Downs, 2015). There is more, and all are related to work-life and citizenship. Questions about what is worth holding onto and letting go crop up. And, with this degree of reach, no answer is inevitable.

Buoyancy

Navigating such turmoil needs learning how to make good use of bad news (Law, 2014c). And staying afloat

in that turbulence needs buoyancy (Law, 2014a). It is learned in a back-and-forth process – between students and the helpers they rub up against, and their experience of upbringing, in neighbourhood and excursions.

Professional thinking (Law, 2011a) can take account of a range of settings for these career-management encounters.

There are locations which are up-close and familiar…

- **families facing tough times** – with a sense of what's right-and-proper and where coping is a priority
- **privileged families** – which expect success, protect their advantages, and see their own as their beneficiaries
- **neighbourhoods** – where beliefs and goods that are shared unite people, and what is not shared can make them strangers to each other

The like-minded are notable for what they do about where they are…

- **gangs** – insiders are expected to display loyalty and allegiance, which may be demanded and can be hostile to outsiders
- **devout** – valuing what is thought of as spiritual well-being and may require religious obedience
- **associations** – loosely organised clubs, societies and websites where people follow shared interests

Institutions have the resources to frame and shape what is possible…

- **organisations** – with the rules and roles found in sport, clubs, cadets, leisure centres and scouts
- **schools and colleges** – which may be remembered for exams but may be valued for meeting your mates
- **businesses** – providing services and offering work, while juggling the changing costs of balancing supply and demand
- **education** – where staff need to deal with the requirements and needs of students, neighbourhoods and officialdom
- **officialdom** – which could be national or local government offices shaping who gets access to what services

The buoyancy question concerns whether and how these encounters influence career management. Different experiences, differently understood, lead to different outcomes. What to hold onto and what to let go will feature in that sense-making conversation. It is buoyant if it lifts students to where they can make sense of how things are, what needs changing, and where to make a start.

Locations of prejudice. All locations can house both buoyant release and entrapping prejudice. It is not easy to separate self improvement from self-congratulation (Brooks, 2015). Any one of these setting can lay blame where no blame belongs. The disdained can be trapped as the authors of their plight (Dunn, 2014). And educators can be captured as instruments of institutional control (Hall, 2015). So there is a careers-work conversation to be opened about snobbery, élitism and prejudice[2]…

'education equips you to claim your right to a place in society'

'that means in your work-life and citizenship'

'there's no hope in giving up on it'

'not for you nor for anybody else'

'in a free society people have a right to live by their beliefs'

'but nobody has a right to impose their beliefs on you'

'not the people who reject you'

nor the people who are close to you'

'they all need your help to understand how things must be'

'that doesn't mean forgetting the past nor does it mean living in obedience to it'

'you can be bigger than that'

'learning how to do it is what education is for'

Buoyancy in any location means calling on experience, and finding new meaning, for supporting sustainable purpose by asking what is worth holding onto and what must be let go.

2 This and similar inserts are illustrative of possible conversations – they are based on the author's experience of teaching and imagining of possibilities – you may well have other experience and imagination to draw on.

Looking good. Not everybody sees education as enabling that kind of commitment and release. Education is vulnerable to capture by interests in employability (Law, 2014b). It wants candidates who look good in selection (Hooley and Yates, 2014). And that argues for the cosmetic curriculum – learning acceptable 'appearance, attractiveness and self-presentation'.

Image cannot create new jobs or improve working conditions, but it can re-arrange the pecking order for available jobs. However, the re-arrangement does not favour the resilient, the distinctive or the creative – it favours the compliant and people who can fake employability. And recruiters are not hard to deceive (Paulhus, et al, 2013), but they are assigning success to image not reality.

There are warnings, for example in the illegal exclusion of the non-compliant (Weal, 2015), in curtailed research agendas (Bishop, 2015), and in the suppression of dissent (Docherty, 2014). It is why educators want student rights built into the curriculum (Bloom, 2015). Furthermore, that competitiveness fails to understand motivation for work (Ariely et al, 2005), and people's search for meaningful work (Choi, 2013). The issues range from work-place exploitation to planetary damage (Jeffrey 2015). A cosmetic curriculum finds no room for posing those hold-and-let questions.

Grasp

Students gathering knowledge to inform their career management is characterised here as 'reach' and 'grasp'. While 'reach' connects them to springboards for action, 'grasp' equips them for sustainable action in an indefinite future. Any collections of aims (Easton, 2014) call it meta-learning. More than acquiring knowledge, it enables people to go on gathering new and changing knowledge. It takes on a process of asking 'how do I know this and what can I do about it?'. Once acquired that process is infinitely reusable in an indefinite and changing future (Law, 2012a). Such learning must be transferable, meaning that 'lessons' remind students of their lives so that their lives remind them of their learning. Developing reach and grasp does not lead to pre-defined performances for test or selection, it leads to intersections between learning and life – learning for living (Law, 2014a)

Intersecting career management. Careers work belongs to a network of outfits set up to enable the reach and grasp of education (BERA, undated). They become learning intersections when students find that what an outfit offers is worth holding onto.

Professional thinking (Law, 2011a) can usefully examine how its offer is but part of a range of learning outfits.

There are formal outfits claiming trained expertise…

- **careers services** – often what people first think of, but seriously under-resourced – provide information to identify work-life possibilities
- **careers education** – delivered as 'lessons' in schools and colleges – though of variable quality in materials and designated staff
- **mainstream education** – where educators get to know students over a prolonged period – with a few who can intersect learning with experience
- **colleges, apprenticeships and universities** – offering opportunities to compete for life chances – and for adventures with new people

In some outfits the offer is supplementary to core commitments…

- **churches, mosques, synagogues and temples** – based on deeply-held and detailed principles – sometimes diffusely spiritual
- **community agencies** – often linked to education, sometimes voluntary – usefully with an understanding of local conditions and experience
- **libraries, museums, galleries and collections** – where visitors gaze at what fascinates, look for more, find surprises and buy reminders

On-line outfits – some professional, some fun, some attention-seeking…

- **career websites** – often careers-education-based and digitising its material – some of it interactively diagnostic
- **dedicated websites** – setting out specific aspects of career experience – usually in narrative form and for interactive use
- **social media** – interactive exchange of impressions and advice on any topic – including career concerns – some poorly informed

Some try to help, some help without trying, some do more harm than good. All pose hold-on-let-go questions.

But, whatever the self-styled deserving and privileged may claim, failure is endemic to the human condition (Law, 2015c). As a species, we have evolved to learn how to make good use of bad news. Enabling and engaging that grasp is an essential part of meta-learning – not least for citizenship and working-life.

Meta-questions. While looking around – say at a museum, or in a church, or on-line – what hold-and-let questions might that call up? A colloquial version of career-learning thinking (Law, 2010) condenses a questioning process in four-stages: finding, sorting, checking and figuring…

'what's going on?'
'am I being pushed'?
'held back?'

'why does it matter?'
'what can I be sure of?'
'who's involved?'

'who and what is important?'
'why?'
'what can anybody say or do about this?'

'what can I say and do about it?'
'with whom and about what?'
'how will that work out?'
'so what do I hold onto and what do I let go?'

This unwillingness to let the past control the future is a feature of independence, creativity and critical thinking (Law, 2014c). Other evidence suggests that impatience with the process can damage creativity (Stewart, 2014). Nonetheless, working on the difficulty can itself be enjoyable (Levitin, 2014). So, might joyousness be an outcome of up-fronting awkward questions? (Faridi, 2014).

Whatever, meta-learning intersects learning and living. And that calls on breadth of mind for grasping ready-for-anything flexibility.

Progress

Ready-for-anything flexibility enables people to deal with commercial leverage, the technologies that make that possible, and the cultures that have grown out of them. This is not change-after-change it is change-upon-change – 'a crisis like no other' (Chakrabortty, 2015). Characterised as liquid modernity, the dynamics of consumerism, immediacy and celebrity leave careers work with few twentieth-century answers to twenty-first-century questions (Law, 2006b)

Saying and listening. That dynamic needs careers workers' listening modes, in 'tell-me-about…' conversations…

'…songs, films and stories – you'll never forget'
'…memories – that trouble you
'…dreams – that keep coming back'
'…experiences – that surprise and excite you
'…what somebody said – that makes you think again'
'…surprises – you find hard to forget'
'…people you've met – like you've never met before'
'…new possibilities – that have just come into view'
'…pressures – that are hard to resist'
'…people – that you could never let down'
'…relationships – that you're beginning to question'
'…promises you've made – and won't break'

Different sources urge differently focussed conversations: cognitive behaviour therapy overlooks influences (Reid and West, 2011); career coaching is strong on an individual pursuit of winning (Law, 2013c); life design rests on psychological constructs (Savickas, et al, 2009); chaos theory breaks new ground (Bright, undated); but also allies itself to psychological constructivism (Prior and Bright, 2011). However, any conversation is a shared experience between people, about groups and engaging with cultures. It intersects both personal with social constructs (Marglit, 2008). And that needs a tell-me-about-it conversation which will examine more than personal constructs can illuminate (BERA, undated).

Time and space. The push-and-pull dynamics of tell-me-about-it talk needs the time and space that only mainstream curriculum affords (Law, 2008b). Educators can set up stage-by-stage learning (Law, 2010) – trialling, practicing, rehearsing and sharpening for action. It needs credible educators alert to learning-for-living intersections. They can engage with decade-upon-decade (NIACE, undated); disappointment-upon-disappointment (Law, 2009b); and blame-upon-blame (Buonfino, 2007).

Interests and influence. It would be a mistake to overlook the dynamics of self-exclusion, which separates itself from the majority (Doward, 2015). The scope for such manoeuvring is uncharted. But careers work is a player (Law, 2015b). The underlying trends are set in motion by global commerce, enticing technologies and emerging cultures – all are changing expectations (Law, 2009b). Students, with their educators and stakeholders, need to work on how to deal with these dynamics.

Framing and positioning. This work has a long time-frame. A century-long unfolding began with matching people to opportunities (Law, 2001). Early on there was acknowledgement of community-interaction (Law, 2009a). Ideas for career learning were aimed at reliably informing action (Law, 2010). Work-life has been increasingly expressed and recognised in narrative terms (Law, 2008a). And asking what, in that narrative, to hold onto and what to let go inevitably follows. The record shows that little of that unfolding has attracted better than a passing interest by the influential (Law, 2015b). And, anyway, curriculum cannot be owned by commerce, government, or profession – it is community property. Any test of the validity of hold-and-let thinking would relate to community experience of how things are. Its pursuit of ready-for-anything flexibility leaves locally-situated careers workers with two questions…

> ‘what usefully connects with how things are here?’
>
> ‘and what doesn’t?’

They are holding-and-letting questions.

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'The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of': the role of the unconscious in career decision making

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The complexity of career paths in the 21st century has led to a rise in the number of career changes in a typical working life. Effective career practitioners, therefore, should have a good understanding of the process of career choice. One aspect of decision making which has attracted attention in the literature is the role of the unconscious or gut instinct. Once considered best ignored, its potency and value are now recognised. Drawing from decision theory, cognitive neuroscience and behavioural economics, this paper summarises evidence of the most common and effective decision making strategies used in career choice, and considers the implications for practice.

Introduction

Indecisiveness has been identified as one of the ten issues which clients are most likely to bring to career practitioners (Gati, Krausz and Osipow, 1996) and it is no wonder that clients find career choices difficult as evidence shows us that career decisions are empirically demanding. Cognitive psychologists have identified some features which render one decision more challenging than another: difficult decisions are those with a large number of alternative options, where there is a degree of uncertainty about the outcome and where there is significant potential for loss if a bad choice is made (Hastie and Dawes, 2010). Career decisions often fall into all three of these categories, with 37,000 job titles to choose between in the UK (ONS, 2010), decisions often being based on incomplete and conflicting information (Gati et al, 1996) and career choice inextricably bound up with identity (Ibarra, 1999).

There is therefore a clear need for information and advice on how to make better decisions, to ensure that practitioners are fully equipped to offer appropriate support to clients who struggle to make their choices. Career learning frameworks (for example Barnes, Bassot and Chant, 2013; Law and Watts, 1977) have long acknowledged the importance of decision making in career learning. The factors influencing the decision are covered in career theories widely – whether those are career interests (Holland, 1997), drivers, (Schein, 1990), chance events, (Bright and Pryor 2005), or life themes (Savickas, 2005), and strategies for career decision making have been examined through decision making styles and profiles (Bimrose and Barnes, 2007; Gati et al, 2010). It is, however, something of a paradox that whilst career decision making looms large in both career theory and practice, the literature provides only a limited understanding of the processes underpinning how good career decisions are made, and little advice on what career practitioners can do to enhance clients' decision making skills. This article seeks to make a start on addressing this gap by summarising the existing relevant literature and making some initial suggestions for practice.

Decision making processes

Scholars have identified two distinct processes through which we make decisions. The first is gut instinct (also referred to as System 1 reason, experiential reason,

or heuristic based reason), which is an unconscious, instantaneous and automatic process that relies heavily (although not exclusively) on emotion. The gut instinct processes almost immeasurable amounts of data in an instant and makes use of a series of heuristics or rules of thumb to reach a conclusion. The second decision making process is conscious rationality, (also known as System 2 or rule based reason) which, by contrast, is a conscious and deliberate strategy: individuals are in control of the process and can articulate the steps involved in reaching the conclusion. Conscious rationality tends to be more comprehensive but demands considerably more cognitive effort than gut instinct. Researchers continue to debate the exact nature of the distinctions between the two systems (Mikels, Maglo, Red and Kaplowitz, 2011). For some scholars, the essence of the difference lies in whether the processing happens in the unconscious (System 1) or the conscious (System 2). For others, the key distinction lies in the role that emotions has on the process, which is thought to be far more significant in System 1 processing (Evans, 2008). Epstein (1994) suggests that the systems differ in how they store knowledge, with the System 1 storage being in the form of images, and the System 2 storage system based on words.

Evidence shows (for example, Kahneman, 2003; Stanovich and West, 2000) that decision makers can reach different conclusions depending on the system used but we should be cautious about generalising these results. Much of the research has been conducted in artificial settings using experimental designs which manipulate participants to use one or the other decision making processes (Mikels et al. 2011) rather than examining real-world decisions.

Rational decision making

Rational decision theory dominated decision making literature for much of the 20th century. Hastie and Dawes (2010) sum up the message which emerged from traditional decision making research that 'a decision is a good one if it follows the laws of logic and probability theory' (p. 42). A number of different rational decision theories have been put forward over the last 50 years (Browning, Halcli and Webster, 2000). The theories presuppose that behaviour is rational, and that when considering what action to take, we weigh up the costs and benefits, and make our choices based on the behaviour which is most likely to bring the highest reward (Homans, 1961).

A rational approach to decision making has been applied directly to the career decision making arena. Expected utility theory (a rational decision theory which is thought to be particularly effective when making probabilistic decisions) has been identified as a useful framework for career choice (Pitz and Harren, 1980). The expected utility theory of careers advocates that an individual should identify the factors which are important in a future job (for example, salary, distance from home, interesting colleagues) and should score each possible career alternative based on the extent to which each job would fulfil each criteria. Scores could then be weighted based on how important a particular factor is, and on the basis of the chances of one's success in each field. Gati (1986) proposed the sequential elimination model, an extension of expected utility theory, in which options are gradually narrowed down, factor by factor: an individual might first rule out all the career options which pay below a certain salary, might then dismiss all those which are more than five miles from home and would final choose the one which would have most interesting colleagues.

Problems with rational decision theories

Rational decision theories have intuitive appeal, but two areas raise doubts about their suitability for career practice.

The first argument lies in the relationship between normative and descriptive approaches to theory. Rational decision theories are normative, in that they seek to provide a model for good decision making: they explain how decisions ought to be made. Descriptive theories, in contrast, simply describe how decisions are made, with no judgement or advice on the effectiveness of these processes. Descriptive approaches have generated empirical evidence which suggests that as decision-makers, we are likely to rely on gut instinct rather than conscious logic in most situations, as Phillips laments (1997: 278), 'those who have considered what actually happens in the decision-making process have offered the nearly unanimous conclusion that rational decision making simply does

not reflect the decider's reality', yet advice on how to make decisions has been almost exclusively rational.

But does this matter to us in practice? Is it problematic that the strategies we advise clients to use are different from those which they have chosen to use themselves? It could be argued that how people actually make decision should have no bearing on career practice – as long as we know the best way to make a decision, we can share that information with clients and encourage them to follow this process. The risk however is that this approach would lead to clients who have nearly reached an instinctive decision being told by a career practitioner to ignore the progress that they have already made and start again from scratch using a different decision making process. This feels like a far more onerous task, both for the client, who loses the understanding they have already gained, and has to start over, and for the career practitioner who needs to find a way to explain and teach a whole new decision making process. A more pragmatic approach to career practice, which would allow clients to capitalise on their existing thinking is to identify successful real-world mechanisms for making career decisions, and then use this understanding to support clients whose decision processes have not been successful. Clients who have nearly reached a decision through their intuition in this case would then be supported to extend their existing strategies to reach a conclusion. This approach too could lead to clients honing their already fairly sophisticated decision making expertise, rather than having to learn a brand new decision making strategy.

The second challenge to the supremacy of rational decision making is that it is often found to be less effective than heuristic based unconscious reason, with evidence gleaned from a wide range of contexts showing that in particular situations intuition can out-perform conscious logic time after time. In fact, Hastie and Dawes (2010:232) conclude that 'we cannot cite any research based proofs that deliberate choice habits are better in practical affairs than going with your gut intuitions'. In summary, evidence suggests that System 2 is neither the most common nor necessarily the most effective way to make decisions.

Although beyond the scope of this article, it is important to acknowledge the cultural dimension on this discussion. The literature covered here is almost exclusively drawn from the west, examining the decision making processes of western participants. Individuals from other cultures may be more likely to rely on different processes for their choices.

Gut instinct

The gut instinct is an unconscious process which makes automatic, instantaneous judgements. The gut instinct makes use of a number of heuristics or rules of thumb which serve as short cuts to help us make reasonably good decisions (Gigernezer, Todd, and the ABC Research Group, 1999). These heuristics are efficient, in that they use minimal cognitive effort and are very fast, and so are useful in most everyday decision making. Researchers estimate that where the conscious can process 2 – 3 bits of information per second, the unconscious can do 11,200,000 bits per second (Dijkstehuis et al, 2006). Heuristics are based on primitive mental processes and are developed over time based on the trial and error of our own experiences, through vicarious learning and via direct instruction (Cohen et al, 1990).

Emotions have been shown to play a significant role in instinctive decisions (Le Doux, 1996; Rolls, 1999; Slovic et al, 2002; Zajonc, 1980). Neuroscience has furnished us with a suggestion of the mechanism at play (Ito and Cacciopo, 1999) proposing that a stimulus triggers a hormonal response: dopamine mediates a positive reaction and acetylcholine mediates a negative reaction. This hormonal response is global (is it is not nuanced and does not acknowledge areas of strength and weakness) producing a general impression of the stimulus (pleasant or unpleasant), and the response is unconscious and instantaneous.

The unconscious process is not voluntary and so is inescapable – we cannot choose not to respond in this way, and it is not verbally explicit so can be hard to articulate (Kahnemann, 2003). One impact of the immediacy of the unconscious response is that our gut instinct can reach a conclusion before the conscious mind has even begun to organise and recall the relevant information (Zajonc, 1980). This explains the experience, familiar to many of us, of knowing that we enjoyed a book, or film, but being unable to recollect a single detail of the plot. This may also explain how

an individual can have a sense that they wouldn't like a particular occupation without necessarily being able to identify any of the core duties which the job might entail.

Evidence suggests that the gut instinct is at least as good a decision making mechanism as rational decision making most of the time (Gigernezer, et al1999; Payne, Bettman, and Johnson, 1993) and has been shown to be particularly effective in making decisions where there is too much information, no definitive right answer, and where creativity is needed to find a solution (Gigerenzer et al, 1999). It is useful to reflect that these factors appertain to many career decisions.

Problems with the gut instinct

A side effect of the reliance on heuristics for decision making is that the gut instinct is subject to a range of biases and errors (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Decision makers relying on their instincts tend to ignore sample sizes, they give a disproportionate significance to recent and out of the ordinary information, and use heuristics which are subject to biases such as context (Huber and Puto, 1983), order effects, (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977) and framing (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Unconscious decisions are relatively intractable – even when new evidence comes to light, instinct often doesn't change to reflect the new information (Zajonc, 1980). Experts in a wide range of fields have been shown to rely on System 1 reasoning, which may suggest that instinct is a more highly advanced decision making mechanism, but the effectiveness of these expert decisions relies on many hours of practice (Gigerenzer, 2007).

How we actually make decisions

I have explained the two systems above as though they are entirely separate systems but inevitably, the reality is not quite as neat.

In the early days of decision theory, System 1 heuristics were thought of as response errors which should be corrected (Cohen, 1981), and later as side effects to normal cognition (Rumelhart, 1984). More recently compelling evidence has emerged on the value of instinct as a complement to tradition models (Chaiken and Trope, 1999; Damasio, 1994). The current direction of thinking is that 'no task is "process pure"' (Ferreira et al, 2006) and that all decisions will rely on both systems of decision making combining the rational conscious logic of System 2 with the intuition of System 1.

The exact nature of the associations between the two processes is still under debate, but whilst a range of dual process models depict different relationships (for example, Griffin, Gonzalez and Varey, 2001; Stanovich and West, 2000) the potency of the gut instinct is generally accepted.

Some suggest that System 2 monitors the quality of mental operations generated by System 1 (Gilbert, 2002), although acknowledge that it doesn't always do it very well (Kahneman and Frederick, 2002). Motivated reasoning (Brownstein, 2003) describes a process of post hoc rationality, in which the conscious mind provides a rational justification for the decision which the unconscious gut instinct has already made. Zajonc, (1980:155) neatly illustrates this with the story of an attempt to use rational logic to decide which job to take: 'I get half way through my…balance sheet and say "Oh hell, it's not coming out right. I have to find a way to get some pluses over on the other side."' When the rules governing instinct and conscious reason conflict, and an individual is faced with choosing between a System 2 outcome which they know is rational, or a System 1 option which they know is not, their gut instinct will often dominate (Denes-Raj and Epstein, 1994).

There is some evidence of the processes which are chosen in different decision making contexts. Hastie and Dawes (2010) identify ten common decision making strategies, ranging from the instinctive 'recognition heuristic' (where an individual chooses the first alternative that they recognise) through to the rational 'additive linear model' (in which each attribute for each option is weighted by their importance to the current goal, and the weighted values are all added up to reveal the right choice). In general, strategies relying on conscious System 2 logic require more cognitive effort, but provide a more comprehensive analysis of the options. Strategies relying on the unconscious System 1 process are easier and quicker,

but are less likely to take all factors or options into account. It seems that decision makers exhibit a fairly sophisticated 'meta-rationality' in choosing which decision making strategies they use (Hastie and Dawes, ibid). The more thorough (i.e. System 2) decision making strategies tend to be used for more important decisions, except in circumstances where information is too plentiful or incomplete, or where outcomes are not predictable. In these cases System 1 logic tends to dominate.

Career decisions

The evidence I have summarised above is principally drawn from decision theory, neuroscience and behavioural economics, but the received wisdom of relying on rational decision making processes has been echoed within the career decision making arena (for example, Holland, 1985; Super, 1980). Krieshok (2009:278) affirms that 'the representation of vocational introspection as a conscious and wilful process remains the dominant paradigm'. But empirical evidence from the career sphere, and inferences which we can reasonably make from the broader decision making field are raising questions around these assumptions in career decision making too.

Much of the evidence garnered from the field of career decision making suggests that intuitive decision styles dominate career choice either as the acknowledged decision making process, or via the process of motivated reasoning described above, but there is some evidence that a combination of conscious and unconscious processes might lead to the best career decisions.

Blustein and Strohmer (1987) conducted research which highlights that students do not always use rational approaches when considering career options. In these studies, participants were asked to assess the personal attributes required for a range of occupations. When examining jobs in occupational areas which they were considering for their own future careers, participants tended to emphasise the need for personal attributes which they felt they themselves possessed; when analysing occupations they were not intending to pursue, participants were more likely to stress the need for personal qualities they did not possess. Participants thus highlighted how well-matched they were to the jobs they were already contemplating, and how unsuitable they would be for those positions which they had previously disregarded.

These results echo Soelberg's (1967) findings that whilst participants reported that they were using rational techniques for career decision making, in reality, they were relying on intuitive approaches and Greenbank (2009:259) who found that 'students were not adopting a rational/comprehensive approach' when it came to decisions about their next steps.

Evidence of links between decision making processes and career outcomes are in very short supply, but one study, (Singh and Greenhaus, 2004) does indicate that when the two systems are combined, decision makers are more likely to make optimal decisions. Their study matched up decision making processes with the degree of person-job fit that career changers experienced in their new jobs and found that participants who made use of both conscious and unconscious decision processes were more likely to find themselves with higher degrees of person-job fit.

In addition to the lessons learned from career decision making theory research, we can make some inferences from the evidence from the broader discipline of decision theory. Hastie and Dawes (2010) conclude that instinctive approaches are fruitful in non-optimal decision making conditions of all sorts: 'these efficient but non-optimal strategies may even be adaptively optimal in noisy, stressful and unforgiving environments' (2010:228). The non-optimal conditions they propose apply to many, if not most career decisions – the information is too vast or is incomplete, the outcome uncertain and the time for decision making limited, supporting the case to incorporate heuristic reason in career choice.

Evidence too exists (Dijkstehuis et al, 2006) that when the decisions are between multi-attribute options (i.e. a range of options which don't all have the same set of features, such as might be faced when comparing two jobs in different industries) the unconscious manages better because of its remarkable computational power. Their supposition is that for any complex intellectual task, the unconscious should out-perform the conscious.

Implications for practice

The research into the processes underpinning career decision making is limited, and our understanding of how good career decisions are made, still more so. But even the incomplete grasp we have serves to highlight that some of the conventions that have long been held true in career practice, should be questioned. I highlight here six common practices or assumptions which current evidence suggests could be questioned.

1. **We don't need to teach decision making processes.** As I mentioned above, the decision making element of career learning programmes tends to focus on the factors which contribute to career decisions, and rarely on the skills needed to hone the cognitive processes required. The evidence presented in the article could indicate that the best decisions are made through the gut instinct of skilled decision makers. One useful focus for career education could be to find ways to enhance decision making powers of our clients.

2. **Rational decisions are likely to be better ones.** The evidence illustrates clearly that the gut instinct has the potential to make at the very least, a positive contribution to effective career decision making. Understanding that instinctive judgements have an important contribution to make to the career decision making process could lead to practitioners encouraging clients to make good use of their unconscious insights.

3. **It is possible to ignore the gut instinct.** Our intuition is automatic and instantaneous and as a consequence we can't control it and we can't switch it off. Acknowledging the inevitability of clients' intuitive responses might lead to insightful career conversations, as a focus on the unconscious process could allow clients to articulate and evaluate the quality of their instinctive reason.

4. **Information is a pre-requisite to opinion.** Most career education assumes that information is the starting point for any career decision. As we saw above, we can have unconscious reactions to stimulus that we don't think we know anything about. Practitioners might usefully open conversations by trying to ascertain clients' emotional reactions to particular occupations, before information is introduced.

5. **Our conscious minds have an accurate understanding of the decision making processes at play.** Research into motivated reasoning illustrates that our conscious minds are not always fully cognisant of the processes at play, attributing decisions made by System 1 reasoning to System 2 logic. Career practitioners could initiate fruitful conversations about their intuitive and emotional reasons even with clients who articulate sound rational reasons for their choices.

Conclusion

The processes by which we make career decisions have been much neglected in literature and, arguably, practice. In this article, I have summarised some of the relevant research into this arena, and stressed that the unconscious processes should not be ignored. The application of decision theory to the careers arena is very much in its infancy and further research is needed to allow us to understand the mechanism at play, the consequences of these mechanisms, and the implications for practice. The evidence, however, even as it stands, can usefully encourage us to question our assumptions, and to foreground career decision making processes in career conversations.

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An exploration into the experiences of career provision by students in 21st century Nigeria

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In 2014, illustrative case study research was conducted to examine existing careers guidance interventions available to two young people in different secondary schools in Nigeria. The aim was to explore their perceptions in terms of the subjective usefulness of those interventions in an educational and labour market context within a growing economy. Analysis indicated that as well as access to careers guidance being inconsistent, the experience of the participants was that the existing provision was not sufficient to support them to develop an appreciable degree of independence, and the career management skills required to meet the demands of the 21st century labour market in particular, and life in general.

Introduction

Before discussing the research it will be useful to provide some contextual background. This paper is based on some research for an MA dissertation by a Nigerian student studying at Canterbury Christ Church University and aims to explore the Nigerian context for careers provision in schools and two young people's first hand experiences of it.

The first attempts to universalize primary education in Nigeria began in 1955, at the regional level prior to the independence of Nigeria in 1960 (Labo-Popoola, et al, 2009). Of the three regions in the country at the time, the Western Region had the most successful model, while the Northern Region had the worst outcomes. The latter occurred as the Muslim dominated region rejected the western education introduced into the country, notably by Christian missionaries at the time. Over the years, this appears to have changed as currently there are schools in the Northern region using the stipulated national curriculum which evolved originally from the British education system. However, recent insurgencies in that region from 2009 until the present time, have been attributed to an extreme Islamist terrorist group purporting to fight against western education in order to uphold Islamic values (Chothia, 2014). This provides some context for the social, cultural and political situation for young people in this region.

The state of ICT usage in Nigeria is also a factor that is worthy of note. There are some limitations ranging from uneven distribution of school computers, insufficient manpower with competence to teach ICT subjects and unreliable power supply among other limitations (Adomi and Kpagban, 2010; Eberendu, 2014). This results in an imbalance in the range and quality of information available to students.

The International Labour Organization suggested a framework for developing globally acceptable career guidance systems in developing countries, taking into account the economic situations of such countries (Hansen, 2006). A key strand of this framework is the understanding of a country's context. This framework might be useful in highlighting possible weaknesses of existing interventions in Nigeria, in relation to significant culturally sensitive factors that might influence the effectiveness of such interventions. The illustration of Northern Nigeria is typical of a situation where differential career theories underpinning any interventions are arguably irrelevant in practice, giving more credibility to approaches that are flexible, interpretive and responsive to the context (Savickas, 2011).

There is also no apparent evidence of explicit career learning in schools. Furthermore the literature shows no evidence of opportunities for young people to tell their stories; how their access to career support or the lack of it affects them, what they think has been useful and how existing provisions could be

improved. Concerns about the preparation of young Nigerian students for unpredictable futures, were the drivers of a need to explore the perspectives of young people themselves and formed the basis of a Masters' dissertation. Using two illustrative case studies, this sought to consider how they had been supported by their respective secondary schools in Nigeria to prepare for uncertain futures.

The specific questions that this research sought to address were:

1. What career guidance support were two young people provided with in their secondary schools?
2. What are their impressions of the usefulness of those interventions, in relation to twenty-first century career development needs?
3. How might career support for young people in Nigerian secondary schools be developed?

A review of literature

Secondary education in Nigeria has two possible aims: to prepare pupils to exit school with the necessary skills to find employment, and/or to prepare them to continue in the academic route of higher education (Moja, 2000). However, in implementing a curriculum designed to meet these purposes Moja (2000:17) notes that, '…the teachers as implementers never understood the underlying approach'. This has resulted in the failure to produce learners who are well equipped to possess employable skills. Although Moja's overarching focus is the effectiveness of the Nigerian educational sector, he identifies the current status of access to career interventions as a significant element to equip young Nigerians for future work experiences, or failure to do so.

In Nigeria's Third National Development Plan (FME, 2010), the Federal Government acknowledged the significant contributions which career counselling can make to the lives of young people and the nation at large. To this end, it proposed an institutionalization of careers counselling as part of the nation's educational training systems. Although this has been done, a number of factors continue to impede its functional operations (Esere, 2004). In presenting the problems of guidance and counselling, Esere asserts that a negative perception of counselling services among school leaders, parents, pupils and teachers, is responsible for considering the provision as an auxiliary function in most schools. This may result in guidance practitioners not being respected and developed as professionals and therefore, that young people may not have access to quality career support from them. The question of why there is a negative perception of professionalised careers guidance lies beyond the scope of this work, but remains an important issue.

The role of Information Technology in schools also influences the quality of education and information provided. Eberendu (2014) shows that a small percentage of schools did indeed have competent staffing to deliver ICT in their schools, yet the lack of availability of facilities hinders their performance. This limits some young people especially in state funded schools to a narrow range of information. The quality of career information they can access online may be limited and the skills to use it may not be available. Based on Thompson's (1998) Personal, Cultural and Structural (PCS) levels analysis, which gives a presentation of three interrelated levels of discrimination, the unequal levels of access to online information in secondary schools is another manifestation of the influences and constraints of a structural level of discrimination (Thompson, 2011). This highlights the unequal learning cultures and access to opportunities in some schools across both sectors of education providers. In addition it highlights the limited IT related skills that are able to be developed by many young people and this may also have considerable implications for their career opportunities.

Methodology

The approach to this research was by the use of an illustrative case study. The aim was to explore the first hand experiences of two young people of Nigerian education and the extent to which they felt it had prepared them for their futures. Whilst not looking for generalisations, this work sought to look at the material gained from specific and particular experiences of the participants. Epistemologically qualitative therefore and interpretative in its nature, this study acknowledges the heuristic position of the researcher who had also experienced a Nigerian education and was therefore both subjective and influential in the data.

This method of enquiry provides an account or story told by an individual of a certain event or series of events (Creswell, 2007). Bell (2010) claims that such accounts are usually in chronological order. However this may not always be the case; rather than chronology, the focus is on making meaning of the story by using 'thick descriptions' to show interactions within a context (Geertz, 1973). It provides in-depth details of the opinions, feelings and thoughts of individuals, which is useful for understanding the perceptions of the participants in this research. Their perceptions are considered important because the effectiveness of the interventions they have accessed will to a large extent be determined by their appreciation of those experiences and consequently, their ownership of carrying out the action plans developed from those opportunities. However, it is important to acknowledge that their stories and subjective interpretations of the meanings do not particularly pay attention to ongoing events such as political or economic issues (Yin, 2014), therefore this research method does not offer generalizable conclusions. However it does offer an illumination of real lives in complex situations.

As this study was originally part of an MA dissertation the researcher selected the participants pragmatically in terms of access and availability in the time available. And, although based on the perceptions of these two individuals, insights can be offered into the experience of other young people in similar schools in Nigeria.

Data collection

Conducting semi-structured interviews remotely over Skype was the main approach for collecting data along with consulting documentary information. Through the interview, specific information was obtained to provide answers to the first question by simply identifying specific career guidance interventions that were provided to the young people by the schools they attended. The career guidance activities and processes involved were explored, along with the intended outcomes of those interventions. Obtaining a document from the schools showing the policy for career provisions would have strengthened the credibility of information on what exactly were the specific career guidance activities delivered in the schools. Since this could not be accessed, the study depended on information given by the participants.

The semi-structured nature of the interview provided opportunities for the participants to give detailed account of their perceptions of how the career interventions affected the decisions and transitions they made in school and after completing secondary education. In addition to the evidence provided by participants, reference was made to documentation including an evaluation instrument used for inspection of secondary schools in Nigeria, the International Labour Organisation's framework for careers guidance in low and middle income countries (Hansen, 2006) and other publications on effective careers provision for young people. These documents provide some insight into 'good practice' in careers work.

The semi-structured interview questions were posed in response to the participants' contributions to earlier fact finding conversations with the researcher, although initial questions were similar for both participants. Both interviews were listened to, recorded and were transcribed by hand. The participants were sent the transcripts to read and make corrections if they wanted, before being read a number of times by the researcher to highlight key words and phrases. This allowed themes to be identified and interpretations made of their possible meaning with regard to the research questions.

Findings

Some of the themes identified in the transcripts are highlighted as follows:

Theme 1: Family and social influences on career development.

Both participants acknowledged the influence of their families and their social contexts on the development of their careers. Their names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Udeme: 'One of the greatest, actually one of the greatest impacts on the choice was one of my uncles, that was working in the oil field, so I just picked an interest in that'.

In reference to his early career ideas about chemical engineering, the above statement indicates that his early knowledge about careers was influenced by interactions with a family member who doubled as a

role model, consequently influencing his early career choices.

Ekemini: '…And what really helps me here…is because my sister, she did biochemistry too, my second sister, she did biochemistry. So she told me…she gave me the…uhm…the number of courses and most of her text books, I used them. All those, her term papers, her drafts she used to write, so it's not really difficult for me.'

Theme 2: Influences of structural factors

Another influence observed to have affected the young people's career development has been the structural factors of the educational sector in the country. The inadequacy of learning resources in the first university Udeme attended, contributed to the difficulty he had in completing the course and a feeling of frustration:

Udeme: 'So I went into the university to study a course that was lucrative in my field, but maybe because of the educational system in the country, they did not really treat what had to do with my field…'

In Ekemini's case, her grades were not enough to gain her admission to study medicine in the university of her choice, however, the university considered her for a place to study biochemistry. The reason why this is relevant to this discussion is that Ekemini only considered the biochemistry option when she found out she could not study her first choice course which was medicine, and as a result, she had to take what was available to her at the time:

Ekemini: '…so when the list came out, my name wasn't out on the medical list, so I had to supplement with biochemistry, 'cause the thought of staying at home was something else, so…I supplemented for biochemistry instead of staying at home and still waiting for medicine'.

This is an example where the university provided her with 'secondary' options to choose from, suggesting how the structure of opportunities influence the choices that can be made (Roberts, 1977).

Theme 3: Access to career guidance

In order to identify the kinds of interventions the young people were provided with in their secondary schools, the participants were asked what kind of careers guidance support they accessed while in school. In response, Udeme said, '…we knew there was a counsellor but never understood why there was a counsellor, so nobody knew the need of going to see the counsellor. This suggests he did not have a one-to-one interaction with the guidance counsellor in his school.

Findings from Ekemini's interview data show that she accessed one-to-one career discussions in her junior secondary years and also participated in extracurricular activities that provided her with opportunities for learning and developing skills. Although the extracurricular activities she participated in might not have been designed as a form of explicit careers guidance, they have some semblance of career exploration and workplace learning.

Ekemini: '…all those things were broadening our knowledge and it also supported us in our choices…'cause you won't do what you don't love' and 'they just wanted us to have the confidence, you know…that we'll be able to do it alone.'

The transcripts from both interviews showed that access to explicit career interventions varied between both participants.

Theme 4: Perceptions of the young people

Udeme believed that career guidance would have enabled him to establish links between his self-awareness and the opportunities he could explore;

> '…Now, at that point, career guidance I think would have helped me understand that,…it would be easier to obtain knowledge in a field you're naturally gifted and interested in. So I think that's the impact career guidance would have had on me. Secondly, I think it would have also shown me the path to tread on, to obtain the goals I have for my future career, the things I have to focus on to attain those goals'.

In addition, his opinion about his lack of guidance can be summed up by the quote below.

> '…the lack of it…how did it affect me, it was a blind man just moving in a direction that he felt was right… that's the description I will give because a blind man has the ability to move and thinks where he is going [is] to the right place but until he is given direction… he will not end up in the right place.'

In Ekemini's case, she believed that the guidance she accessed had given her some encouragement to support her career development.

> '…I just think everything was okay since there was someone to counsel us…you know, someone you can interact with and tell the things you like with. I just think that was okay because they don't have that in all schools, most of the schools around here, they don't have it'.

Discussion and conclusion

An exploration of the data shows that the contexts of the individuals play a significant role in their career development. Both participants drew either inspiration or valuable information from members of their social networks and their Christian beliefs. However, their social networks could only provide them with information that was limited in both range and quality.

Furthermore, it seems that the participants' original career aspirations did not develop as expected. This may be indicative of the poor preparation these young people received for a complex and demanding national and global labour market. This study seems to indicate that these, and perhaps other young Nigerians are not receiving adequate preparation for the 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) that will face them in the future. This term expresses the way in which society, and in this context specifically the labour market, is in a constant state of flux; people and their lives having to respond just as liquid takes the shape of a container. The structures that have long provided stability and some prediction of the future have changed or become less powerful such as family, the State, the work place and in some countries the Church. The question of whether young people are being prepared for such fluidity is at the heart of this research. This work has shown from interactions with the participants, that the provision of proactive interventions for students does not appear to be a top priority for the schools they attended. Consequently their ability to provide quality guidance interventions is questionable. The claim is founded on the perceived inadequacy of timely and intentional efforts to ensure that students developed the awareness and career management skills which are relevant to their current and future needs.

Furthermore both participants, based on their experiences, acknowledged careers guidance as a potentially useful intervention for young people. This does not concur with Esere's (2004) assertion that a range of stakeholders including young people have a poor perception of counselling in schools. These young people valued and welcomed such interventions but simply did not have adequate understanding of the service or access to available help.

Evidence given by one of the participants suggests that the current approach of the interventions may still be based on the established theories.

> 'The school I was…we had a guidance counsellor that before you…enter your senior school, you're gonna be asked…what subjects you're good at and what subjects you aren't good at, so instead of going into there just 'cause you want to do, you do what you're good at, where you have high grades…'

If this is the case more widely it will be useful to review the approaches for guidance practice in the country and consider more contemporary approaches. For example, a constructivist approach allows individuals to construct meaning, in this case of career, through their social contexts and experiences (Patton and McMahon, 2006). It may enable them to explore more meaningful, albeit constrained constructs of their past and present experiences, within their own context. Social constructivism places such meaning making into a social context and is the ontological basis of Savickas's Life Design (2012). Understanding of identity, skills and interests is reflected upon in order to understand not only the trajectory of career, but life as a whole. This holistic approach may be more useful in this and other contexts than more established career theories (Reid, 2006). In considering ways in which this could be delivered in practice, career learning and development should integrate activities

of careers education, information, advice and guidance or counselling, as well as lifelong learning (Barnes, Bassot and Chant, 2011). This can be delivered in one-to-one settings as well as in career learning sessions. In one-to-one interventions, a key constructivist approach is the use of narratives through which the practitioner, working alongside the client, facilitates an understanding of how past or current events may affect their lives, and how they might respond to them (Reid, 2006).

However Reid, in 2006, questioned whether this approach may be too abstract in practice for some, and it may be that integration into an extablished interview structure or model for interviewing would strengthen its more widespread use. Moreover Roberts (2009, p.358) argues that the focus of career development should be seeking the source of change in opportunity structures rather than 'probing young people's minds'. Furthermore time restrictions to build rapport with a client, may impede its practicality in a fast paced, target-driven work environement (Bujold, 2004). Nonetheless literature is keeping pace with the needs of emerging practice. The Handbook of Life Design (Nota and Rossier, 2015) explores the development of this particular approach to narrative counselling across Europe and considers a wide range of contexts, client groups and their needs. Moreover, and importantly for this research, contexts for practice away from the European and western are considered by McMahon and Watson (2016) and Arulmani et al (2014).

In conclusion, the participants in this study had varying experiences in relation to career guidance support being provided in their schools. In the context of the 21st century labour market, the approach and quality of interventions provided to these young people did not do enough to prepare them for the demands of an unpredictable labour market. As stated earlier, although this work explored two particular cases, their responses and thoughts provide insight into the current provision in Nigeria.

In the light of these, this study suggests that secondary schools in Nigeria further develop careers provision for students which should be made available for all age groups. The goal of such provision should move on from helping young people to make decisions for transitions at key stages, toward supporting young people to attain independence for their career development and life as a whole. This may not of course be a lesson for only the Nigerian context. To this end a constructivist approach seems appropriate as it supports the development of young people's career knowledge, skills for life and work and also lifelong learning through interactions and understanding of their social contexts. The CLD 'Bridge' model described by Barnes et al, (2011) encompasses a range of interventions with a contructivist orientation and pays attention to social and cultural contexts.

Finally, if careers guidance is to have a positive impact for young people in schools, educational institutions must invest in the provision of ICT resources, in order to give both practitioner and young people access to a range of quality information. At a time where Nigeria is facing considerable political and economic challenges, its greatest asset, its young people, should be enabled to make the very most of their own and their country's opportunities. Poor quality or unavailable support for young people is a false economy, in any context.

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Career learning in schools in Scotland – past, present and future

Graham Allan

Career education has never been statutory in Scotland but has nonetheless been subject to the ebb and flow of government policy. At times this has been helpful, generating funding, guidelines and advice. However, government engagement has also been characterised by short-termism and, often, wasteful repetition. In Scotland, by 2015, there will be a model that is underpinned by several new policy initiatives, one which locates learning about life and work within the curriculum, and one which provides more robust quality assurance arrangements. This could be the makings of a concerted national effort to improve career learning or yet another short-term initiative that eventually leaves us back where we started.

Introduction

Career education and guidance in Scotland are fully-devolved functions of the Scottish Parliament and the provision of career education, or career learning, is the responsibility of local authorities and individual schools. Over recent years government engagement in Scotland has been characterised by periodic interest in specific aspects of career learning, usually as a result of a report or the publication of a new policy or guidelines, and the provision of some temporary funding to develop it. However, inevitably, a government 'gaze' moves elsewhere, leaving behind some traces of the initiative it spawned but probably not enough to embed any change in the long term. A good example of this was the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), albeit at that time an initiative of the UK government as it pre-dated the creation of the Scottish Parliament. From the mid-1980s to1990s, TVEI promoted vocational education, employer engagement, work experience and better preparation of young people for the world of work. When the funding came to an end in 1997 (the cost had been around £900 million across the UK) so too did the secondments for staff and the support for schools. Similarly, Education Business Partnerships were formed in the 1990s to promote employer engagement in schools, but when the funding ended so too did the effort.

Initiatives to support career learning have invariably deployed the key words and phrases: career(s) education, with or without the 's' (sometimes in the same document!), world of work, work related learning, enterprise, employer engagement, work experience etc., but evidence of consistent, embedded programmes of progressive and developmental learning about careers is limited (Howieson and Semple, 1996, 2000, 2007). In 1996, Howieson and Semple described career education as lacking progression, planning and integration with career guidance. This is not dissimilar to the situation in England (Barnes, 2000; Barnes, Donoghue and Sadler, 2002). Scotland never experimented with the notion of making career education a statutory requirement as happened in England and Wales between 1998 and 2007. Both Scotland and England had for a time national framework documents for careers education (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2001; Department for Education and Skills, 2003) but again there is little evidence of their application in practice (Howieson and Semple, 2006; Howieson and Semple, 2007; Mulvey, 2006).

Policies

Over the years and alongside other initiatives we have also had policy developments in Scotland that gave us a pupil support system in schools (Scottish

Education Department,1968) and created promoted 'guidance' teachers with responsibility for careers work and liaising with the careers officer (SED, 1971). This additional career-focused support assisted, for example, in the development of work experience and the beginnings of careers education in personal and social education programmes. In 1986, 'More Than Feelings of Concern' (SCCG, 1986), discussed careers education for the first time as both a permeating feature of school subjects and discrete career-related activities separate from the curriculum:

> The Committee recognises the potential of careers education through the curriculum…[but] does not believe that this can be achieved simply by permeating the curriculum. There is a need for units timetabled for all pupils, at least from S2 onwards…taught by members of staff with appropriate skills.
>
> (SCCG, 1986: 27)

In the 1990s the then Scottish Executive published performance indicators for education for work activities and guidelines on promoting education industry links in schools (SCCC, 1997, 1999). The 1999 document stated: 'Education for work is a major priority for all sectors of education, industry and the wider community' (SCCC, 1999: v). Also in the 1990s and 2000s the schools inspectorate in Scotland (HMIe, 2000, 2004) conducted reviews of careers work, principally around how schools were promoting 'education for work' and 'enterprise'. The 2004 document, a guide on quality indicators for enterprise activities, stated, 'The guide recognises and underlines the importance of enterprise in education as playing a key part in the education of all young people' (HMIe, 2004: 1). In 2001, Learning and Teaching Scotland published the 'Career Education Framework', which was heralded as '…the first national document of its kind…to demonstrate the place of career education within the school curriculum' (LTS: ii), conveniently forgetting that we had similar publications in 1986 (SCCG) and 1999 (SCCC). This document again reiterated the importance of permeating careers education through the curriculum as well as providing discrete activities:

> The core career education programme will normally be provided through discrete career lessons and activities. However, these need to be supported by career links to other parts of the curriculum. Career work is relevant to every department.
>
> (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2001: 9)

This notion of permeated and discrete models of delivery has been explored in a range of literature. Tony Watts, in his discussion of careers education in the UK and other European countries (Watts, 2001), identified four delivery models (specific enclosed, extended enclosed, integrated and extra-curricular), the OECD (Sweet and Watts, 2004) discussed 'stand-alone', 'subsumed' and 'infused' models, and Barnes, Bassot and Chant (2011) have recently discussed the merits of 'separate' and 'integrated' provision. The literature essentially values having a model that integrates career learning into school subjects but also provides for separate stand-alone inputs. This is the model that emerges from the policy documents in Scotland.

A high water mark

The 2000s were probably the high water mark in the development of career learning in Scotland. With the publication of the Careers Education National Framework (LTS, 2001), the interest shown by advisory bodies such the Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum and its successor, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the publication of performance and quality indicators and a heightened level of interest being shown by HMI in careers work, there seemed to be an affirmative answer to the question posed at the beginning of this article as to whether we had at least the potential for developing a progressive and developmental career learning programme in Scottish schools. This was further bolstered by the creation of a new national careers service in Scotland, Careers Scotland, in 2002, with a policy to develop career learning resources for schools and provide support for teachers in delivering careers work underpinned by extensive funding from the government. Careers Scotland, initially extremely well-resourced, subsequently published a comprehensive guide to career education products and services that it would offer to schools, developed a series of 100 'career box' lessons for use in schools at different

ages and stages and appointed dedicated career staff, 'enterprise in education advisers', to deliver career learning activities and provide support and training for teachers (Careers Scotland, 2003; 2004). We therefore had what was perhaps a national, concerted effort to promote career learning in secondary schools. A sense of this was captured by Semple (2002) and Howieson and Semple (2006), writing about careers education and careers guidance in Scotland, and by Tony Watts in his review of Careers Scotland in 2005:

> Careers Scotland provides materials and training to build the capacity of schools to deliver career education programmes designed to develop pupils' career management skills…Careers Scotland also organises teacher placements in business and industry; and in nearly half of local authorities it administers pupil work-experience placements.
>
> (Watts, 2005: 24)

In addition we also saw the introduction of 'Determined to Succeed' (Scottish Executive, 2002, 2003), which provided temporary funding to promote enterprising learning, work-based vocational learning and career education:

> Our vision is for our programme of Enterprise in Education to give pupils the wide range of experiences needed to increase their self-confidence, to motivate and to provide them with an understanding of the world of work and the opportunities that are open to them.
>
> (Scottish Executive, 2002: Ministerial Foreword)

This initiative ran from 2003 to 2011 and, by the beginning of its final phase, was able to report that:

> Significant progress has been made…we have enjoyed unprecedented support from the business community…enterprising approaches in all local authority areas are increasingly evident…children and young people are developing enterprising, entrepreneurial and employability skills.
>
> (Scottish Government, 2008a: 4 and 9)

Quality assurance is the key to the success of any policy and, as noted above, through the HM Inspectorate in Scotland, we had the makings of this for career learning in the early 2000's. In 1997 the HMI published quality indicators for education industry links in schools (SCCC, 1997), then a thematic report on education for work in schools (Scottish Executive, 2000), quality indicators for enterprise (HMIe, 2004) and a thematic review on improving enterprise (Scottish Government, 2008b). Taken together these signalled a commitment from the HMI to seek out evidence of world of work activities in the course of their inspections (Semple, 2008). In 2014 this was further strengthened when HMI were given responsibility for the review and quality assurance of careers service provision in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2014), with the main focus on reviewing the work of Skills Development Scotland, both in schools and with partner organisations. Importantly these review reports will also capture the quality of career learning in schools and school inspections by HMI's will in future be expected to comment explicitly on a school's performance in this area (Scottish Government, 2014).

How is it looking now?

The curriculum in Scottish schools has undergone a major transformation in recent years which, in 2014-15, has reached the final senior phase of secondary schooling. Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2004; Scottish Executive, 2004; Scottish Government, 2009) has aimed to develop four 'capacities' in children and young people through the curriculum, namely successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. It is significant for career learning in that, while it makes little mention of providing discrete or separate career learning activities, it focusses heavily on embedding skills for life and work into the curriculum. It (Curriculum for Excellence):

> '…empowers schools and local authorities to expand, develop and embed entrepreneurial activities…within all areas of the curriculum, developing the right progressions in skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work. Moreover, making appropriate connections with the world of work within all subjects…will ensure all young people…have the opportunity

to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.'

(Scottish Government, 2008a: p17).

To support the principles in Curriculum for Excellence for the effective engagement of learners, Skills Development Scotland (the successor to Careers Scotland in 2008) published the 'Career Management Skills Framework for Scotland' (CMS) in 2012. CMS is aimed at enabling individuals to take more responsibility for managing their own career development with a focus on evaluating their 'self, strengths, horizons and networks'. This has been loosely based on the 'Canadian Blueprint for Life/ Work Design' (Jarvis, 2003). Supporting CMS is an extensive web-based offer of information and resources called 'My World of Work', and work is underway to develop related resources for schools similar to the career box materials developed by Careers Scotland after 2003.

Determined to Succeed has come and gone, with its emphasis on developing an understanding of the world of work and promoting links to industry and entrepreneurial thinking. Curriculum for Excellence is entering the senior phase of schooling with its emphasis on embedding understanding of the skills needed for life and work, and we now have the report of the Commission on Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (Scottish Government, 2014). In January 2013, the Scottish government established this commission to develop proposals to 'enable young people to make the best transition from a broad general education under CfE into a comprehensive range of opportunities for vocational and further education and training…[and to]…stimulate work awareness and work readiness, and make best use of work experience' (Scottish Government, 2014: 74).

While the emphasis in the report is mainly on promoting vocational opportunities, particularly modern apprenticeships and 'industry relevant vocational pathways alongside academic studies', it also made recommendations which have some relevance to career learning in schools. For example, the report wants an effort to be made to improve work experience, promote employer engagement, more access to 'career guidance' at an earlier age and the development of a new standard to quality assure these. The report calls for:

- greater 'exposure' for young people 'to a wide range of career options (p8) …[and]…early careers advice and world of work knowledge in S1 and S3' (p23)
- 'schools and employers systematically working together in meaningful partnership to expose young people to the opportunities available across the modern economy' (p8)
- the quality of work experience and career guidance to be 'significantly enhanced…[with] … all school pupils to receive work experience and career guidance…by 2020' (p9) …[and] '…work experience should feature in Education Scotland school inspections' (p10)
- 'a more comprehensive standard for careers guidance which would reflect the involvement of employers and their role and input' (p10)
- 'regional industry-led Invest in Youth Groups across Scotland and a single point of contact and support to facilitate engagement between employers and education' (p12).

The draft standards for career education were published for consultation in May 2015 by Education Scotland (it is interesting to see a return of this phrase and pleasing that the 's' remains dropped even if 'career learning' is surely more appropriate to the principles of CfE and CMS). The standards set out a progression pathway from early level (i.e. primary school) to senior phase (i.e. end of secondary schooling) that describes the knowledge and experiences that can be provided through the curriculum to prepare young people for the world of work. The following examples demonstrate the developmental nature of this learning:

- By the end of early level… 'I can talk with my friends and family about their jobs' (p14)
- By the end of second level… 'I can use my skills to get more information about jobs/ careers' (p15)
- By the senior phase… 'I can apply well developed career management skills reflecting on a variety of experiences of the world of work to navigate the best pathway for me through a range of learning and career pathways (p15)

There is also a draft standard for Work Placements and these will be followed in the autumn of 2015 by standards for School Employer Partnerships.

In all of the above there is a sense that issues that informed past initiatives are being revisited. The concept of a progressive and developmental approach to learning about work and one's place in it, as described in the draft career education standards, would be familiar to anyone reading the content of the Careers Education National Framework that was published in 2001 and discussed earlier in this paper (LTS, 2001). The Invest in Youth Groups mirror the work of Determined to Succeed enterprise development officers and Careers Scotland enterprise in education advisers to coordinate career and enterprise education activities. Providing early careers advice revisits Careers Scotland's work with younger school pupils, including those in primary schools. Improved work experience and partnership with employers echo TVEI, EBP, Compacts, DtS and every work related learning policy since the late 1960s. The three new standards for career education, work placements and school employer partnerships envisaged by the Commission could have been developed overnight from any number of past frameworks and HMI quality assurance systems: education for work (Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum,1999), careers education (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2001), and self-evaluation and quality indicators (SCCC, 1997; HM Inspectorate of Education, 2004; Scottish Government, 2008b). Why are we still trying to promote the notion that all pupils should receive work experience, this time by 2020, and why are we only now expecting school inspection reports to contain references to the quality of work experience? The draft Work Placements standards pointedly quote a young person's comment in March 2015 that, 'Placement tasks need to be more hands on'. We have not come very far since the late 1960s when such a comment can feature in a 2015 policy document.

In 2015 in Scotland we are in the middle of one development and about to embark on another. Currently, Curriculum for Excellence, building on Determined to Succeed, may be able to promote career learning through the curriculum for the first time because the focus is on permeating skills for personal planning, an understanding of the world of work and 'planning for choices and changes' into school subjects. History tells us however that this is fraught with difficulties, suggesting a model that both permeates the curriculum and provides for extra-curricular activities is more likely to be effective (SCCG, 1986; Watts, 2001; Sweet and Watts, 2004). But perhaps the linking of skills for learning, life and work to an explicitly curriculum-focused initiative can overcome these difficulties. Complementing this is the work of Skills Development Scotland on developing resources for teachers to support the development of young people's career management skills, but this is also fraught because of the challenge of shifting young people from the role of passive receiver of career learning to active contributor to their own career learning (Jarvis, 2003; Lovén, 2003, Amundson, 2003), and because the resources are being developed for and not by teachers themselves. For the future, the report of the Commission on Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (Scottish Government, 2014) offers the prospect of seven years of funding (temporary: sic) to support increased employer engagement (initially £13 million in 2014 and £15.6 million from 2015/16), improved work experience and better coordination of world of work activities (however this is also contentious because it has been tried so many times before, recently under the auspices of Determined to Succeed with a significantly larger budget, and is another example of top-down development).

Perhaps the above does represent a meaningful effort to develop a programme of career learning in Scotland's schools through the curriculum, supported by the national career guidance agency and employer engagement but its language, intent and temporary nature also remind us of earlier efforts to do the very same thing. The beginning of this paper noted that career learning in schools in Scotland is largely managed by local authorities and schools themselves. It is not clear that looking to the future there will be the effort and willpower from teachers themselves to embrace the possibilities offered by the above developments: initial teacher training and even teacher CPD has little or nothing to say about the teacher's role in career learning and none of the initiative is coming from teachers themselves. Interestingly, the recent paper from Teach First, Careers Education in the Classroom, though for an English context, calls for

teachers to take on the responsibility for careers and employability education: 'ITT [Initial Teacher Training] must prepare all trainees adequately for their pastoral roles regarding careers and employability and help them embed careers content in their subject teaching' (Teach First, 2015: 15). There is no corresponding call in Scotland.

Conclusion

From the evidence it seems that career learning in Scotland has often been trapped in its own version of *Groundhog Day*. Initiatives come with a flourish and some temporary funding, invariably set out to improve some aspect of learning about careers in schools and then disappear leaving only a limited legacy and a vague and diminishing signature. Such initiatives seem to have little direct impact on teachers themselves. It remains to be seen whether the current 'perfect storm' of CfE, CMS and Developing Scotland's Young Workforce will provide the critical mass to enable us to break free from the repetitive cycle of initiative and policy fiddling and the feeling of despondency which comes from knowing we are repeating the same events over and over again in our home-grown version of *Groundhog Day*.

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Further education learners' prior experience of career education and guidance: A case study of Chesterfield College

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This article explores further education (FE) students' prior experiences of careers education. The research draws on and extends the limited literature that exists around career support in further education. A mixed methods case study was used to explore students' experience of careers work prior to attending Chesterfield College and to examine the implications of this for the college's provision of career support. Findings indicate that the majority of students had limited contact with careers workers prior to their arrival at the college and, in instances when they had contact, often had a negative preconception of this contact. These findings are discussed with reference to the college's careers education provision and the wider implications for the sector.

Introduction

Further education (FE) is a varied and complex aspect of the English education system (Hillier, 2015). The sector includes private, voluntary and public institutions and covers both vocational and academic subjects from a basic level to postgraduate study. FE is a key progression route for school students. Students typically enter FE at either 16 or 18 although FE colleges also serve as the backbone of England's lifelong learning system. Consequently FE competes both with school sixth forms and with universities for students.

Schools have a vested interest in retaining students at 16 for reasons of funding. It is also frequently alleged that schools give greater prominence to higher education (university) progression routes than to FE. Because of this the Association of Colleges (Fresh Minds, 2014) has stressed both the value of career guidance and the importance of this guidance being well appraised of the range of opportunities that exist within the FE sector. This article will explore these issues through a case study of Chesterfield College.

Recent policy in England

Policy support and funding for career education and guidance in schools has always been fragile and uncertain (Peck, 2004). However, since the election of the coalition government in 2010 there has been a considerable erosion of provision with the loss of Connexions as a national service (Hooley and Watts, 2011) and the transfer of the responsibility for career guidance to schools. This has resulted in the fragmentation of young people's opportunity to access career guidance with some schools maintaining or even improving services while others have allowed provision to decline (Langley, Hooley and Bertuchi, 2014; Hooley, Matheson and Watts, 2014). One of the key questions that the research presented in this paper will address is how far this shifting policy environment has impacted on the experience of young people who are progressing to further education.

Policy has also shifted for the provision of careers work in FE. In June 2013 new guidelines for securing independent careers advice for FE colleges were announced. This was subsequently updated in 2015 (DBIS and DFE, 2015) with a new version which built on the earlier version. The guidelines sought to ensure that students from Year 8 (ages 12-13) to the age of 18

receive careers advice. These guidelines are similar to those set out for schools albeit with some important differences. The main difference is that the guidelines for colleges, unlike those for schools, are only advisory. Furthermore, while schools have to secure access to independent careers advice (with 'independent' defined explicitly as 'external to the school'), colleges do not have to do this unless there are no existing advisers who can deliver the provision. This recognises the fact that many FE institutions have student support services which often hold the Matrix Standard (Watts, 2013) and that as a consequence have the internal capability to deliver high quality careers work.

Careers work in the case study college

Chesterfield College is a large FE college in Derbyshire. The college has around 3000 full time 16-18 students and 250 full time HE students. The college also has 5000 apprentices based across the county. Careers work is well established in the college and takes forms which are recognisable from other parts of the sector.

There has been limited research on careers work in FE (e.g. Hawthorn, 1996; Sadler and Atkinson, 1998; Watts, 2001; Mulvey, 2010). However, much of this work is increasingly out of date in a sector that has changed radically as a result of the policy of the previous government (Lupton, Unwin and Thomson, 2015). There is a desperate need to renew research interest in careers work in further education as it has received scant attention over recent years in comparison to schools. The consideration of this case study of careers work within Chesterfield College will hopefully provide a useful stimulus for wider research on the sector.

Mulvey (2010) characterises career education and guidance in FE as taking three main forms: (1) pre-entry guidance; (2) guidance delivered during the period of study; and (3) guidance delivered at the point of exit from the learning programme. This summary is echoed by Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) (2010) which states that careers provision in FE colleges:

> Helps learners to reach their potential by ensuring placement on correct programmes, addressing barriers, supporting them on programmes to reach their learning goals and increase their employability, and facilitating next steps and progression. It also improves their ability to manage their career and pathway throughout life.

This model of provision is in evidence in the case study college with the principal writing that quality careers advice should be provided 'before and during their time at college' and that students should be helped to 'find the right route for success' (Culforth, 2015). The case study college also followed Watts' (2001) observation that career education in FE tends to be built into either a scheme of work or tutorial programme.

Careers provision in Chesterfield College has been judged to be of a high quality. The college's 2013 Ofsted report stated that throughout the college, 'particularly good information, advice and guidance ensure learners are on the appropriate programmes' (Ofsted, 2013a).

When the Ofsted inspection took place the college was about to roll out a new admissions process which included the provision of a careers interview for all full time courses and some part time course. Subsequently this pre-entry guidance has been deepened with more use being made of local labour market information. This is done via an online tool called careers coach that links careers with labour market information, to enable applicants to link the course with future careers. The increased prominence for pre-entry guidance is in response to the change in careers provision in schools. The focus on pre-entry guidance in FE was also supported by LSIS (Bowes, Bysshe, Neat and Howe, 2012) which found that good quality and timely pre-entry careers advice supported students to 'address diverse and complex needs and helps overcome barriers to accessing FE'.

Chesterfield College evidenced well developed and popular on-programme careers support for students. The guidance team offer one–to-one careers interviews to students, deliver group career learning sessions within the curriculum, and support curriculum

staff to use careers data gathered in the admission process and support students to develop their career researching skills and employability.

Finally, the case study college also provides a range of exit career support. When students are coming to the end of their course tutors support students with their options. If students are unsure, want to go into higher education or get a job or an apprenticeship then they are encouraged to access additional support from the college's guidance team. This kind of proactive approach has been developed in part because although many FE students intend to access career support many fail to actually do so (observed by Bowes et al, 2012). Consequently the college's proactive approach seeks to ensure that support is provided and employability is maximised.

The need for career support in relation to progression to further education

Many young people's career building is strongly influenced by their parents (Witherspoon, 1995; Foskett, Dyke and Maringe, 2004). However, by the age of sixteen, students are increasingly making their own decisions albeit often within the boundaries that are set explicitly or implicitly by parents. Around this point they are presented with a wide array of choices at both 16 and 18 including the possibility of studying in FE.

Many students indicate that they would like more help with career decision-making (Bowes et al 2005). Rather than drawing on written sources of information, students typically value the involvement of people who are involved in employment or have been in similar positions to themselves (Munro and Elsom, 2000; Blenkinsop, McCrone, Wade and Morris, 2006). Both Foskett et al (2004) and White, Rolfe and Killeen (1996) suggest that 'official' advice, often from teachers or other school staff is more influential than that of family and friends. Given this, the changes in the availability of career support in English schools offers a cause for concern.

There is considerable evidence that career education and guidance can support effective transition from school to further learning (Hooley et al, 2014). As well as supporting positive transitions career education can also support people to make more purposeful and sustainable choices. Kidd and Wardman (1999) found that students who had received a careers education at school were less likely to switch courses in post-16 education.

In addition there is evidence that there is a considerable student demand for career education and guidance. Demand can be difficult to measure in relation to careers guidance (Sullivan, 1999) as students may be aware of a need for help, but unaware that career guidance could potentially help them. However, recent research from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Life Skills (2013) surveyed over 2000 14-25 year olds: 93% felt they were not provided with the information they needed to make informed choices on their future career; moreover, they were particularly badly advised about further education and other vocational routes. Around two-thirds of those surveyed had received guidance on more traditional routes, A-Level choices (62%) and university (65%); only a quarter (26%) had information on starting an apprenticeship; even fewer (17%) had guidance on which vocational qualifications might be available. Many young people felt that they wanted more information with respondents highlighting that they would like more information: on subject choices for GCSEs and A Levels (10%); on the educational pathways available (20%); from employers (16%); on work experience and internships; and on the value and relevance of qualifications (13%). Some of these findings were echoed by Ofsted (2013b) which found that many students wanted more career education and guidance and work experience.

The Association of Colleges (2014) examined some of these issues from the perspective of further education. In a survey of 341 sixth form schools and colleges the AoC found that less than half of these organisations identified that schools in their areas are providing students with independent careers advice about post 16 choices. Most respondents (74%) felt that careers advice in schools had got worse. The decline of career support in schools raises important strategic and moral questions for the FE sector about how to

ensure that school students are aware of FE, appraised of its value, and clear about how to transition from school to this sector.

Findings from the case study

This research project examined the experience of career education and guidance reported by college students who had left school the previous year. It also explored the careers support they would like whilst studying at the case study college. The research used a mixed methods approach which included a semi-structured focus group of 20 students, a survey of college students and the experiences of one of the authors of working within the college.

The survey sought to ascertain what careers advice and support students had received prior to applying to college and what students wanted from the careers service in order to develop it further. It gathered 452 responses. 40% of respondents were aged 16 with a further 56% being between the ages of 17-20. 55% were female and 45% were male.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) reported that they had not seen a careers adviser prior to coming to college. A majority (72%) stated that they had never seen a careers adviser. Respondents gave a range of reasons for not accessing career support including: 'didn't get much info on who to talk to'; 'spoke about [careers] to tutors'; and 'because I already knew what I wanted to do'. Some respondents stated that they were not given the option to see a careers adviser, that they did not get enough information about who to speak to, that they did not think they had access to a careers adviser at school or that 'no one at school was bothered'. To compensate for this lack of career support at school, many respondents reported seeking advice at college open days or from advisers at the college. Despite this mixed set of experiences the majority of respondents (59%) stated that they would be interested in accessing career support at college.

Students were asked what careers support they had accessed. The most common answers are given in table 1.

Table 1:
Before you came to college, what careers help did you have? (Most common answers)

None	37%
Connexions	20%
Tutors	2%
Parents	2%

When students were asked in the questionnaire how they would rate the career support they had at school less than half rated it as good or excellent.

The majority of those that had received no careers advice prior to attending college stated that they would like to see a careers adviser in the future. One respondent stated that 'I have never seen a careers adviser so I would like to see one to see what information they give out' another respondent felt that it would be helpful to see someone about their career rather than having to make all of their choices on their own. A minority of respondents (19%) had already taken up this kind of support since arriving at the college. Of the rest 31% stated that they wanted 'support with job search', with a small minority of respondents also asking for support with UCAS or CV writing.

The survey therefore suggested that many college students had limited experience of accessing career support prior to entry in the college. It also suggested that many were keen to access more support now they were enrolled in the college. The focus group discussions then explored these findings in more depth.

The first discussion centred around previous careers education experience. Several of the students commented on the quality of external careers providers which the school had. One student claimed, 'We had to "do everything ourselves" in terms of' researching their own careers options. One found that careers advisers in school had 'placed them on the wrong course' so opted to ask family members or teachers for advice. Several students suggested that more one-to-one support would have been more useful. Careers lessons in school were criticised as

they were not a formal part of the curriculum as one respondent explained 'At our school it was an additional lesson. It wasn't a part of the curriculum. You chose whether you did it or not.'

The second discussion concerned the students' ideas about what careers support they would like to see in the college. Some students stressed the importance of one-on-one support and a 'bigger presence' from the careers team. Many also wanted their course tutors to give them clear advice on careers linked to their course.

Conclusions

Recent policy has resulted in a decline in the quality and quantity of career support that is available in the school system. Given this, it is likely to be important for FE colleges to monitor new students' experience with careers education and guidance to better understand how the changes in schools are impacting on students' educational and career decision making as well as on their understanding of career education and guidance.

The case study demonstrates that respondents have had a mixed experience of careers guidance and support at school. In developing provision within FE it is important that colleges recognise this mixed experience and put in place measures to support applicants. This may include the delivery of key services such as pre course career support, as well as the college seeking to inform students' understanding of the value of career support and what to expect from this.

This case study does not claim to be representative of wider experience in the FE sector. However the findings chime with wider research and suggest that the cuts to school based career support may require a creative response from FE colleges. Mulvey's description of FE careers provision is useful in creating a structure against which this activity can be organised.

In the case study institution the following strategies have been adopted to try and address this.

Pre-entry provision. Allowing applicants to access one-to-one advice and group sessions prior to enrolment to ensure that they are on the correct path for their career and that they are aware of their progression options. The college has also been evaluating the new admissions process to explore its impact on students and ascertain how it influences students' use of career support services within the college. The College has also begun to deliver an impartial career service with a local school and is looking to expand this into other schools as part of becoming a careers hub (as described by AoC and LSIS, 2012) for the area.

On-programme provision. Ensuring that students have access to high quality guidance whilst on-programme particularly where they need advice on how any choices, such as dropping out or switching programme, might impact on their careers.

Exit provision. Providing high quality careers programmes informed by labour market information. This includes both provision delivered through the central guidance team and that provided by tutors within subject areas.

It is evident from the literature and this current study that colleges have an important role with respect to offering careers support to potential and existing students. This article has explored how this role is discharged by one college, but it is evident that more needs to done with regard to careers research in FE to ensure that students in FE are not forgotten and practice within the sector continues to develop.

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Enhancing professionalism – progressing the career development sector

Claire Johnson and Siobhan Neary

Much has changed in the career development sector since the launch of the Careers Profession Task Force report, 'Towards a Strong Careers Profession' in 2010. The report made recommendations for enhancing the professionalism of the career sector including the establishment of an overarching professional body, new qualification levels and common professional standards. The Careers Profession Alliance (CPA) and then the Career Development Institute (CDI), launched in April 2013 have striven to facilitate the sector to be stronger and more cohesive by addressing these recommendations. This article explores what was needed, what has been achieved and plans for the future.

Introduction

Following publication of the Task Force report, the Vice Chair, Professor Rachel Mulvey wrote an article for the NICEC Journal (Mulvey, 2011) and quoted the Chair, Dame Ruth Silver, as having described the sector as 'tentacular', Mulvey goes on to state that,

> the landscape really is very complex: it runs along a spectrum of provision from youth to any age, by way of targeted groups needing particular attention; it includes people in education – secondary, further, vocational, professional and higher and training (off and on the job) and those not in education or training with provision ranging from formal publically funded services to informal grass roots activities either of which may experience management by target or by self-regulation (2011: 6).

This acknowledges the complexity of the sector and specifically that career development services were offered by people from a range of organisations and with differing qualifications and job titles. What was needed was a means of unifying the sector through focus on commonality, enhancing professional standards through defining a recognised minimum level of qualification, establishing a common code of ethical practice and an explicit commitment to continuous professional development (CPD). This would provide those outside the sector with a better understanding as to what professional career development offers. It would also support those within it to understand what being a career development professional means and how this status could be achieved maintained and enhanced.

'Towards a Strong Profession' (CPTF, 2010) contained a series of 14 recommendations. Although aspirational these aimed to provide a framework that would support the sector moving forward and to take responsibility for itself. This article examines the progress that has been made since the launch of the report in 2010; it is not possible to address all of the recommendations in depth so we focus on those recommendations addressing unification and standardisation within the sector.

What was needed: Starting to tame the tentacles

The recommendations focused on the need for cohesion, increased professionalism, progression and continuous professional development (CPD) across the sector:

- Establishing an overarching group of professional bodies as a single authoritative voice;
- Developing common professional standards and a common code of ethics, leading in time, to the

establishment of a Register of Practice for careers professionals;

- Establishing minimum entry level qualification for careers professionals of QCF Level 6 and a commitment to Continuous Professional Development (CPD);
- Transition arrangements for those practising below Level 6;
- Development of a single career progression framework including a work-based route;
- Demonstration of a commitment to Continuous Professional Development;
- Initial training and CPD to include a focus on LMI and STEM; and
- Random sampling of self-declared minimum level of CPD.

Further recommendations addressed working to improve practice within school, colleges and work-based learning:

- Maintenance and strengthening of the careers education and guidance partnership model;
- Overarching national kite mark to validate the different CEIAG awards;
- The need for providers of career guidance in schools, colleges and work-based learning to meet a nationally approved quality standard; and
- Sharing of good practice.

Finally they related to quality assurance and reporting on progress:

- Thematic reviews by Ofsted;
- Government commissioned reports on progress towards achievements of the recommendations.

An early priority for the sector was to continue with the establishment of the overarching group combining the four main membership bodies: Association of Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG); Association of Careers Professionals International (ACPI); Institute for Career Guidance (ICG) and the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA)[1]. This work had already been started by the Careers Profession Alliance (CPA) and over the following years these bodies came together into a single professional body for the career development sector across the UK, the Career Development Institute (CDI) which was launched on 1st April 2013. This bringing together of four of the major bodies established a new era for career development within the UK. It provided the opportunity for all career development practitioners to see themselves as having more in common than they have of difference. This was something that had been demanded for some time (Neary-Booth and Peck, 2009). Finally the sector had a unified voice to represent practitioners.

Standardising the sector

The CDI inherited from the CPA the Blueprint for the Register of Career Development Professionals and Career Progression Framework (2012) which:

- described the context within which a national Register of Career Development Professionals and career progression framework (CPF) had been developed by the CPA;
- set out a model for a professional standards framework for the CPA/successor body within which the Register of Career Development Professionals and associated CPF would sit;
- set out a blueprint for the national Register of Career Development Professionals including the qualification and competency requirements for the register.

This became the UK Register for Career Development Professionals and clearly set out the requirements for being a recognised career development professional including adherence to a code of ethics and a commitment to a minimum of 25 hours CPD a year. A challenge for standardisation of the qualification criterion for the register was the plethora of qualifications and particularly the levels of qualifications on offer.

The ICG was previously the awarding body for the Qualification in Career Guidance/Development which is offered within a Master's degree or Post Graduate Diploma, set at QCF level 7/SCQF level 11. The CDI took over this awarding body function as part of its inheritance. Outside of the work of the CPA, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) the then sector skills council developed the work-based qualifications for the sector, QCF Level 3 Award in Supporting Clients to Overcome Barriers to Learning and Work, QCF

1 The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) had withdrawn from the CPA in 2012.

Level 4 Diploma in Career Information and Advice and QCF Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development. This meant that there was now also a more comparable work-based pathway available at a higher level which provided the transition arrangements to the professional qualification level for the sector. However this only addressed the practice of one part of the career development sector, career advisers.

The CDI is a UK-wide professional association whose membership covers: career advisers, career educators, career coaches and talent managers as well as those working in supporting, administrative, research and managerial roles in the sector. The challenge was therefore to establish cohesion across a diverse sector, across the UK, and to recognise the full range of relevant qualifications as well as the vast experience of those people without qualifications.

In developing the register the CPA had, through necessity, begun with the qualifications held by the majority of practitioners and hence it was very career guidance centric. Since the appointment of the CDI Professional Development Manager in January 2014 work has taken place with the Professional Standards Committee to broaden the range of qualifications at QCF Level 6 or above/SCQF Level 11 (Scotland) which are accepted for registration. These now include those held by career educators as well as those by career coaches and talent managers. The register has provided the medium, through which all career development practitioners can be recognised as professionals, it contributes to a collective professional identity and standardises and promotes relevant qualification levels for the sector. Encouragingly the number of people on the register has risen from just over 200 in April 2013 to over 1200 in April 2015. This represents over a quarter of the current CDI membership.

Importantly, the broadening of the range of qualifications accepted also extends the sector by recognising occupations that align with career development. This allows members of other professional associations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the British Psychological Society (BPS), to regard themselves as part of the careers profession and join the CDI's Register.

As with all new organisations, developments can take time. The qualifications have been addressed and the next stage is to explore opportunities for recognising those people with extensive experience but who lack the relevant qualifications. The CDI is working to address this and to support practitioners to prove the value of their experience and have this acknowledged for the purposes of gaining entry to the register. The development of the National Occupational Standards: Career Development (NOS: CD) (CDI, 2014a) provides the ideal vehicle for addressing this.

In January 2014 the CDI won guardianship from UKCES of the National Occupational Standards: Career Development (NOS: CD). Their subsequent revision and publication in November 2014 means that they can now be used to describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform all of the functions at any level of role across the sector. This is highly important as it provides a common language which benchmarks the various roles within career development and offers clarity to practitioners and employers as to the activities defined within career development practice. Throughout the coming year the CDI will be providing training events for managers on how to use the NOS: CD, as well as a Resource Guide (CDI, 2015a), targeted at employers, which shows how the NOS: CD can be used to support practitioners to deliver effective services to clients. Using the NOS effectively will contribute to the ongoing professionalisation and CPD within the sector by encouraging a standardised, consistent and quality approach to workforce recruitment and development as well as organisational performance management.

Progression

An issue for many practitioners has been a lack of understanding as to what career opportunities are available in the career sector and what they need in order to progress their career. To address this a Career Development Sector Progression Pathway (CDI, 2015b) has now been developed which defines the:

- three main branches of the sector (career education; career guidance/development and career coaching/talent management);
- levels of role within each branch (first contact; support, practitioner, specialist practitioner; research/technical; manager, senior manager and

specialist role – lecturer/consultant/inspectorate);
- common functions of each role based on the NOS: CD or other relevant NOS; and
- qualifications required for each role.

Crucially this means that it is possible now for practitioners working at different levels to see how to progress to the qualification level required for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals. It also allows the CDI as the professional body for the sector to state the qualification level required for professional practice and thus meet the recommendation made in the Careers Profession Task Force report.

The Pathway also provides the opportunity for the CDI to emphasise the need to use common job titles for the professional roles, e.g. Career Adviser; Career Coach. The plethora of job titles identified in 'Understanding a 'career in careers'' (Neary, Marriott and Hooley, 2014) showed 103 different job titles used in the sector. The issues in relation to job title are generally a concern in the UK; elsewhere in the world the term career counsellor is more generally recognised. Moreover, the Pathway provides an opportunity to promote both consistency within job titles and differentiation between job roles. The Pathway provides greater clarity supporting members of the public to see what qualifications to expect from those providing career development services; employers to see what level of qualification should be held and practitioners to see how to progress through their own career.

Maintaining professional standards

Maintaining professional standards is crucial to any profession. Professional practice is not just about having the relevant qualifications; CPD is a vital component which ensures practice is current and up to date. Engagement with CPD is assessed annually for 10% of the register by the CDI Professional Development Manager for quality assurance purposes. Failure to fulfil this requirement, without good reason, results in removal from the register.

Engagement with CPD is a cornerstone of professional practice and enhances both professional identity of the individual practitioner and the professional status of the sector (Neary, 2014). Demonstrating commitment to CPD is a requirement for membership of the CDI and Register. Advances in technology now mean that meeting the CPD requirement can be done in a variety of ways. This is of particular importance to professionals for whom the time or finance required for CPD can be a challenge, either because of targeted delivery methods or the parameters of self-employed practice. To help practitioners the CDI offers a range of CPD opportunities including webinars. It also supports interest groups and has a thriving set of Communities of Interest which are LinkedIn based and enable career educators, independent coaches and consultants, practitioners working with clients who have learning difficulties and disabilities, researchers, students and HE practitioners to meet virtually and share good practice, ideas and expertise. National groups of practitioners also meet in Wales and Scotland as well as regional groups across England. All of these contribute to promoting the commonality of practice and to building the knowledge and expertise of those committed to developing their professional practice.

The partnership with NICEC has also provided new opportunities for CPD for practitioners. This approach has enabled NICEC and CDI members to meet and learn about recent research from across the sector and reflect on how skills and knowledge can be applied. The availability of the NICEC Journal, which is free to CDI members, also means that practitioners can learn more about professional practice both in the UK and abroad. This relationship provides practitioners with the opportunity to engage with research and to, hopefully, contribute to the evidence base which informs developing practice.

Abiding by the CDI Code of Ethics (CDI, 2014b) is another criterion for registration and the Code of Ethics developed by the CPA was updated by the Professional Standards Committee in October 2014 to make it more accessible to, and relevant for, both members of the public and employed and self-employed practitioners. A Discipline and Complaints Procedure has also been established.

Where next?

'Towards a strong careers profession' (CPTF, 2010) was originally conceived to set out a vision for the careers workforce working with young people. It concluded that the findings were applicable to all parts

of the careers profession. Ironically, we now have a service for adults but a fragmented and weakened service for young people. In 2013 Ofsted conducted a thematic review which identified that three-quarters of schools are not providing impartial careers advice, the guidance for schools was not sufficiently explicit and that there is a lack of opportunity for young people to engage with employers. Some of these issues are being addressed, we do not have the space here to explore this in more detail; however the CDI is committed to supporting the career development workforce for young people and much is being done.

Recognising the important role played by career educators and how this role works in partnership with those professionals providing career guidance, was identified as one of the recommendation in the Careers Profession Task Force report. The role of the career educator has however, become increasingly challenged but is increasingly important. The Government's failure to mention career guidance delivered by qualified professionals or the role of the CDI in the Statutory Guidance 'Career Guidance and Inspiration in Schools' (DfE, 2014), although disheartening for professionals working in the sector, only led to renewed efforts to make its voice heard. The subsequent guidance 'Career Guidance and Inspiration in Schools' (DfE, 2015) has since addressed this and recognised the role of the CDI in setting and maintaining professional standards. Also the Quality in Career Standard (QiCS), (Careers England, 2012) which provides national validation for the range of careers education, information, advice and guidance awards in England has also been acknowledged and reinforces the importance of structured and managed approaches to career learning.

However, the issues of careers education for young people continue to be problematic. Hooley, Watts and Andrews (2015) argue that good quality careers education and employability needs to be curriculum driven and embedded within the school ethos. They suggest that there is a need to build the capacity and professional status for teachers in school. This offers a challenge to the CDI to be the organisation to drive and support this agenda. To address this the CDI works with its Community of Interest for career education to provide bespoke training, conferences and publications for career educators. In July 2014 the CDI published, 'Careers Guidance in Schools and Colleges: a guide to best practice and commissioning careers guidance services' (CDI, 2014c) in order to support colleagues in schools and colleges in the commissioning of external career development services. It also published 'Why does Employment Engagement Matter?' (CDI, 2014d) 'which provided support in managing employer activities in schools and colleges. The development of quality careers education and employability in schools is central to ensuring that all young people are supported to develop the skills and knowledge and the ability to apply them effectively to support their own progression. At the heart of this is the need to have a highly effective workforce, working in partnership and supported by a professional body committed to ensuring that all members, regardless of where they work and the role they undertake, will have the tools they need to be the professional practitioners they desire to be.

Conclusion

The Careers Profession Task Force report entrusted the profession with much of the responsibility for change; to shape its own destiny and to forge a stronger profession. These were not inconsiderable challenges and the CDI has been focused since its inception in addressing these. However, not all of the recommendations were in the sector's gift to achieve. One of the report's recommendations was for government commissioned reports on progress towards achievements of the recommendations. Given the lack of value placed on career services by the Coalition Government it was not surprising that no such progress reports were commissioned. However as this article shows much has been achieved in the attempt to create a cohesive sector and enhance the professionalism of those working in it. Whatever the political landscape looks like across the UK, following the new Government in 2015, more challenges will be inevitable. However the profession is now more unified and in a stronger position to face whatever lies ahead.

In the Foreword to the Careers Profession Task Force 2010 report, the Chair, Dame Ruth Silver said,

> Professionalism underpins quality and our recommendations are designed to uphold common professional standards and ethics that will raise the standards and integrity of career guidance in this country. And we are convinced that this new era of

enhanced professional practice in career guidance will endure, regardless of any changes made to the way careers services are structured.

Prescient words indeed.

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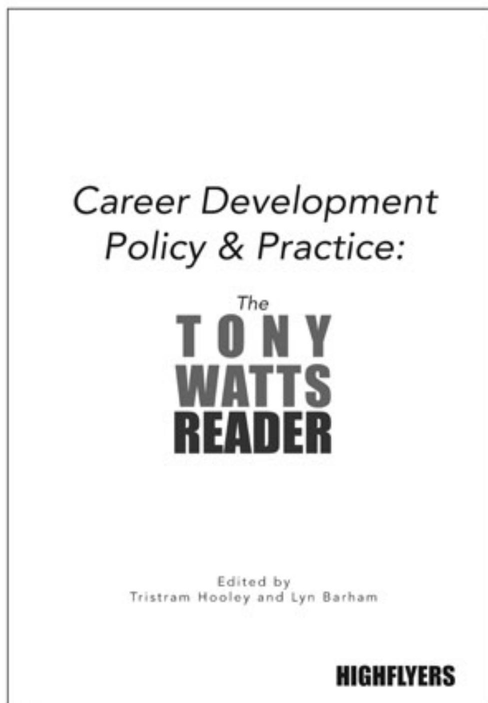

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NICEC Events Calendar

Event	Place	Date and Time
Seminar: Professor Ewart Keep, Oxford University	London	Thursday 26 November 2015 5pm-6.30pm
Seminar: Lesley Haughton and Jackie Sadler, NICEC Fellows	London	Wednesday 20 January 2016 5pm-6.30pm
Network meeting	TBC	Thursday 17th March 2016 2pm-5pm
Seminar: Rehabilitation of Offenders, Leigh Henderson, NICEC Fellow	London	Monday 9 May 2016 5pm-6.30pm
Seminar: Details to be advised	London	Tuesday 20 June 2016 5pm-6.30pm
Seminar: Details to be advised	London	Thursday 24 November 2016 5pm-6.30pm

Event Costs: included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members. Seminars are charged at £20 and network meetings at £40 for non-members.

CDI Training and Events Programme

CDI Skills and Training Workshops		
An Introduction to Careers Work in Schools and Colleges	Manchester London	Tuesday 19 January 2016 Wednesday 16 March 2016
Advanced Career Guidance and Coaching Skills	Manchester Oxford York	Tuesday 24 November 2015 Thursday 21 January 2016 Tuesday 22 March 2016
Social Media for Beginners	London	Friday 15 January 2016
Insight into Labour Market Information	London	Tuesday 26 January 2016
Introductory Level Management Training Programmes 2015/2016	London	Thursday 5 November 2015 Tuesday 8 December 2015 Thursday 14 January 2016 Wednesday 17 February 2016
Advanced level Management Training Programme 2015/2016	Birmingham TBC TBC	Thursday 26 November 2015 Thursday 17 December 2015 Thursday 28 January 2016
CDI Day Conferences		
Engaging with young people and adults with SEND: an opportunity to learn from experts, ask questions and share ideas and experiences	York London Exeter	Wednesday 21 October 2015 Wednesday 9 December 2015 Wednesday 10 February 2016
Annual Conference (Schools) - Heredity deals the cards, environment plays them: Harnessing careers work to support social mobility	Birmingham	Wednesday 22 June 2016
Other Events		
CDI Annual Conference and Exhibition	Cardiff	Monday 9 November 2015 Tuesday 10 November 2015
Webinars	See CDI website for details	

All CDI events can be booked via the CDI website at: www.thecdi.net/Skills-Training-Events

CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for the career development sector. We have a rich heritage, bringing together the membership of ACEG, ACPi (UK); ICG and NAEGA to create a single voice for a diverse sector.

We have a key role to play in influencing UK skills policy as it affects those with whom career development practitioners work and a clear purpose to improve and assure the quality and availability of career development opportunities for all throughout the UK.

We have a strong and growing membership of individuals, students and affiliate organisations – all of whom subscribe to a Code of Ethics and are committed to continuous professional development. We are also the custodians of the UK Register for Career Development Professionals and the National Occupational Standards for the Career Development sector.

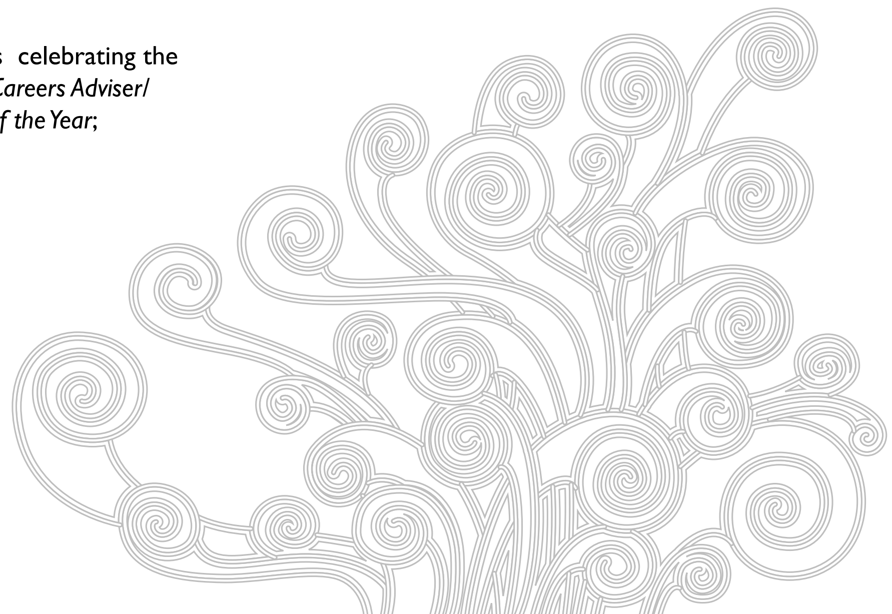
We have established:

- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website **www.thecdi.net**; social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of events and conferences based on a training needs analysis of members and an Annual Conference and Exhibition;
- A media presence with the CDI as the *expert voice* in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;
- The UK Career Development Awards celebrating the best in day to day practice, including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Teacher of the Year*;
- Business development success winning several major tenders including the National Occupational Standards and projects with the Skills Show;
- A platform for a career progression pathway for the sector.

The CDI has a critical role to play in setting standards and articulating what quality looks like for the sector. Importantly we are an awarding body, managing the Qualification in Career Guidance (Development in Scotland) and the UK Register for Career Development Professionals, which is pivotal to our ongoing quality agenda and is fast becoming recognised as the sector's equivalent to chartered status.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with NICEC on the Journal and future research-focused events in the career development sector and now have a seat on the NICEC Editorial Board.

The Journal will be distributed to all CDI members twice a year – with the April and October edition of *Career Matters*.



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