

# JOURNAL OF THE National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

April 2020 | Issue 44



## 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.

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## TITLE

The official title of the journal for citation purposes is *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* (Print ISSN 2046-1348; online ISSN 2059-4879). It is widely and informally referred to as 'the NICEC journal'. Its former title was *Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal*, ISSN 1472-6564, published by CRAC, and the final edition under this title was issue 25. To avoid confusion we have retained the numbering of editions used under the previous title.

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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.



# National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

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# Overview and introduction

Welcome to the April 2020 edition of the NICEC journal. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to be guest editors.

In planning our call for this edition, we aimed to prioritise certain broad themes. We were interested in research that addresses issues about decent work and uncertain labour markets. We also asked for articles that use theory and research to inform career development policy and practice.

The eight articles published in this edition span a range of topics, all of which align to our themes in various ways. Unsurprisingly perhaps, due to who we are as editors (we all work in universities with backgrounds as careers practitioners), many of the articles relate to career development policy and practice in higher education.

Decent work has been present in the international arena for two decades primarily driven by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Social justice, full employment and decent work now figure expressly in the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, it is a concept that has largely been absent from career development policy, practice or scholarship. Decent work has represented an ambitious international agenda, but one which raises questions for many people. Blustein (2019) in the book reviewed in this journal highlights some of the shortcomings of the decent work policy agenda, specifically around its lack of emphasis on work that has meaning and purpose. Hooley (2019) has also warned that however attractive decent work may seem, it is wise for career development specialists to be wary of aligning themselves too closely to specific public policy instruments.

In 2019, a major new ILO report was published that made specific recommendations about decent work. Much of what proponents of decent work argue for aligns with career development priorities, e.g., a universal entitlement to lifelong learning, and supporting people through future of work transitions. Wider issues of social/public policy that are key to decent work have tended to be a lower priority for

careers practitioners, although the recent re-direction towards social justice in career guidance, makes the case that practitioners should re-orient their attention to structural issues and be agents of change.

In this edition **Robertson et al.** explicitly address the role of trade unions as key advocates of work, being pivotal in creating social dialogue and giving voice to workers, an important component of decent work. He and his co-authors explore case studies of how careers workers and trade unions can work together fruitfully.

Articles from **Buzdugan** and **Delauzun** address the dilemmas faced by practitioners in supporting more ethical and critical approaches to career development pedagogy and advice and guidance. Effectively, they challenge readers to consider how we support clients and others to engage critically with features of work that may not be decent!

We also asked for articles that address uncertain labour markets and unstable public policy contexts. There have been rapid changes across the globe in the world of work with far-reaching impacts, even for the students and graduates of UK universities who are the focus of attention for many of our authors. We are experiencing the advance of technology in changing work, as well as growing inequalities in labour markets and society, and fears of the halting of intergenerational mobility, not to mention continued economic and political uncertainty.

A number of articles address issues of uncertainty. Reid's, and Scurry et al.'s articles are sociologically oriented. They address inequalities and what these mean for careers practitioners. **Reid** reports on her work with the elite occupation of medicine, **Scurry et al.** write about their research with practitioners in understanding the role of graduate resilience. **Pasha** addresses uncertainty but draws from organisational studies literature, interestingly presenting the concept of career dynamism that she developed in her recent doctoral studies.

Finally, our call was open to authors who weave theory and research into practice. **Dacre Pool** provides a

reflective update upon the CareerEDGE model of employability in higher education that will be welcome to those familiar with or new to the model. This has been an influential model in the graduate employability literature, and draws upon a different theoretical tradition to that of career development, although addressing similar topics. **Boyd and Boyd's** article introduces us to findings from recent doctoral work into careers fairs, creating new insights into a feature of career development practice that has endured for decades.

In conclusion, we offer you a 'smorgasbord' of articles that we hope will make you stop and think and inform your future practice. As editors, we resist being jaded about the way things are and believe that openness to dialogue, rigorous research and diverse viewpoints can make a real impact on our own practice and prompt us all to re-connect with our values and purpose. We hope that we fulfil this commitment in our selection of articles.

## Covid-19, career guidance and the importance of decent work

The Covid-19 pandemic emerged at the same time as we prepared for final publication of this edition of the journal. Our themes of decent work and uncertainty have been amplified by the crisis to an extent we could never have imagined possible. The extraordinary nature of this global pandemic compelled us to want to include some thoughts about Covid-19, career guidance and decent work. We write here about it from our English context, but expect our comments may be relevant to readers in other nations.

It is too early to know for sure how Covid-19 will affect work and careers. We must recognise the gravity of what the current situation means for working lives, but also resist doom-mongering that risks creating its own self-fulfilling prophecy. Commentators from within and outside our field have already begun to debate causes of and responses to the spreading of the virus. The UN's environment chief, Inger Andersen (Carrington, 2020) points to environmental degradation as being a direct cause of its emergence. Hooley, Sultana and Thomsen (2020) argue that many capitalist societies

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with their focus on economics and market principles are ill-prepared for a health emergency which needs strong social safety nets to protect workers and citizens.

In the UK, we have witnessed some heartening responses to the virus that relate to work. Suddenly it became important to determine the definition of a 'key worker', which has made us all reflect upon the importance of many workers we usually take for granted. For example, low-waged supermarket staff and delivery drivers have been recognised as having an essential status alongside nurses and doctors. However, more negatively, the political legacy of the BREXIT policy means there are shortages of 'key workers', e.g., social carers and agricultural workers.

The profound connection between each of us and our local communities, our nation and the rest of the world is impossible to ignore. The virus rides on the coat tails of globalisation and has been carried across the world with international travellers. Margaret Thatcher's claim that there is 'no such thing as society' has been exposed

as absurd. The virus demands a collective and societal response. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to the collision of our lives as workers, as citizens and as family members (or equivalent). We have experienced this as editors; while working to finalise this journal, we have separately been dealing with home-schooling children, caring for very vulnerable relatives, and managing our own anxieties. We all hold multiple identities and it seems ridiculous to ignore how these are interconnected. More generally, this exposes the fault lines in assumptions about people as rational career actors. The current crisis has highlighted the impossibility of seeing work as anything other than profoundly connected to our lives as a whole.

Uncertainty will be a very real feature of working lives for many people because of the virus. Some will lose their jobs; some businesses even with government support may never re-open. The incomes of particular groups, e.g. self-employed workers appear particularly at risk. A concern for us as editors working in higher education is the challenge the post-virus world will represent for those who are just starting out in their careers. Many of those in more secure work will have work rapidly transformed, as practices such as travelling long distances for face-to-face meetings will be questioned, as workers get more accustomed to technology.

The principles of decent work can help society re-build and recover from this crisis. Those principles are: creating productive and freely chosen work; protecting rights at work; ensuring social protection for workers; and enabling social dialogue between workers and employers. Such ideas can help us move forwards in a world that will never be the same after this crisis. Career guidance can play an important part in supporting these principles.

Career practitioners will be crucial in helping individuals to navigate the uncertainty that will follow the Covid-19 crisis. The establishment of a universal right for all citizens to access careers advice and guidance would help workers in managing careers that have been derailed and disrupted. This advice can include everything from the practicalities of self-employment, to coping with redundancy, as well as making career decisions and all aspects of career management. The recent turn to careers guidance for social justice is timely in arguing that career practitioners should be agents of change in pointing out unfairness and advocating for the most vulnerable. It is not enough for us to default to a focus on helping people to compete with each other for a few sought after jobs. We should be arguing for there to be

decent and meaningful work for all, not just the lucky few who may have the resources to surf the Covid-19 tidal wave.

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# Trade unions and career services: Potential partners for promoting social justice at work

Peter J. Robertson, Nick Cimini, Jouke Post, & James Corry

This paper argues that trade unions represent natural allies for career services, as they have shared interests in addressing issues of social justice at work. This potentially valuable partnership has been under-developed. Two case studies of innovative practice will be presented, one relating to guidance practice in the Netherlands, the other related to career education proposals in Scotland. The challenges to be overcome in union involvement in careers work are explored. Working with unions represents a pragmatic approach to career guidance practice that is responsive to the social justice implications of new employment relationships.

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## Introduction

In recent years, influential texts have focused attention on economic inequality and its harmful social consequences (notably Piketty, 2014; Standing, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). They persuasively demonstrated that whilst more equal societies do better across a range of quality of life indicators, market-led growth has led to deepening inequalities. International bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) share these concerns about growing disparity between rich and poor, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has focused attention on their decent work agenda, and the trend for employment that fails to meet acceptable standards (ILO, 2020). Recognition of these issues has led to a resurgence of interest in social justice in the career guidance profession (e.g. Irving, 2005; Sultana, 2014a&b).

An aspect of this focus is a concern that career services have themselves become infused with neoliberal assumptions, and that their practices inadvertently place responsibility on individuals to adapt themselves to the requirements of an economic system that preserves socio-economic status inequalities, and is potentially exploitative (Hooley, Sultana, & Thomsen, 2017).

Discussion of social justice in career guidance has become conceptually rich in recent years, but for the most part the literature is intellectual rather than pragmatic. Whilst volume 2 of Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen's book (2018) represents a step towards answering the question 'what can the career guidance profession do in response to growing inequality driven by neoliberal ideology?'; there remains further work to be done in offering practitioners a way forward. In this article we suggest that aligning the work of career services with trades union may offer some practical solutions.

Trade unions play an important role in helping to combat inequalities (Navarro, 2002; Dromey, 2018). As discussed in a recent Global Deal report, 'social dialogue and tripartite collective bargaining' (between governments, employers and unions) can 'reduce inequalities in labour markets, improve their functioning and deliver sound and productive labour relations...' and that in advanced economies, '...co-ordinated and centralised collective bargaining systems contribute to higher employment, lower unemployment and lower inequality than fully decentralised systems with weak collective bargaining' (Global Deal 2018, p. 8).

Despite a general decline in membership since a peak in the 1970s, trade unions remain the largest membership-based organisations globally and continue to provide an

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important voice for millions of workers. By aggregating the power of the workforce, trade unions can act as a critical counterweight to employers. They can help workers win a fairer share of the wealth generated, reduce information asymmetries, collectively organise workers and improve their bargaining power - as well as support litigation and class actions (Silberman & Irani 2016, cited in OECD 2019).

Gottschalk and Joyce (1997) show that countries with a strong trade union movement, strong social contracts (between governments, employers and unions), and highly centralised collective bargaining agreements, have lower income inequalities than countries such as the USA and the UK, where trade unions are weak due to unfavourable policy environments. Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and France, for example, all have centralised bargaining systems, and have lower income inequality than the USA and UK. Declining rates of union membership directly contributed to an increase in wage inequality in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s (Gosling & Machin, 1995; Card, Lemieux & Riddell, 2004).

Trade unions have a strong concern to address inequality and injustice at work, and have extensive practical experience of doing this. This article will develop arguments presented by Cimini & Robertson (2018) for the involvement of trade unions in career education and guidance. Firstly, union involvement in career guidance will be considered, illustrated by a case study from the Netherlands. Secondly, union involvement in career education will be discussed with reference to proposals from Scotland. Potential challenges and dilemmas for practice are then highlighted. Finally, the case is made that trade unions and career services are natural allies in promoting decent work.

### **Union involvement in career guidance for adults and workers**

Examples of union involvement in practice can be found in the published literature. Plant (2005; 2008) describes union led initiatives to provide guidance in the workplace in the UK and in Denmark. In both countries peer based educational guidance has been

provided to promote lifelong learning. In Denmark, a distinctive approach took the form of 'guidance corners', establishing a presence in a canteen or social space in the workplace. This model does not lend itself to the private individual conversations typical of career guidance, but Thomsen (2012) argues this is potentially a virtue, fostering the development of a supportive community, where peers are drawn into career conversations. Peer support in the workplace offers advantages of accessibility, even to those on shift work who might normally have difficulty in accessing guidance. Sustaining the model in Denmark has been challenging (Keil, 2008), in part due to its reliance on peer support rather than specialists with ownership of the process.

CEDEFOP (2008) looked at guidance in the workplace and identified seven European examples of union involvement: in England, Denmark, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland, and Sweden. They found that accessible locations for service delivery were valuable. The sustainability of services was a key concern, not just in Denmark but across several countries. Ultimately this depends on securing funding, but the training of advisers and co-ordination also made a difference to service sustainability.

Ford & Watts (1998) described initiatives to introduce guidance for union members in the UK, where this provision is now well established, and has proved sustainable. Union learning representatives have a legally protected role, as elected members of an independent union. Recognised by the employer, they champion training and development in the workplace. It is primarily educational guidance that is offered, as this sits well with employers' needs to encourage skill development, and with government aspirations to promote lifelong learning. Vocational guidance, or advice to support planning for future employment aspirations is downplayed as this offers more potential conflict with employer needs.

Recently attention has turned to union support for young people entering industry from vocational education and training (TUC, 2018), and also to young workers (TUC, 2017a) - most recently including 'career kickstart reviews' (TUC, 2019). This reflects a recognition by the union movement of weaknesses in provision of information and advice and guidance for youth in England. These activities are part of a wider

UnionLearn strategy (TUC, 2017b), with support to access learning, particularly for disadvantaged groups (TUC, 2017c) as central to the approach.

Our first case study relates to an innovative cross-sectoral guidance service provided by a union, which does not rely solely on peer support, but also employs specialist career development practitioners.

### **Case Study One: James in the Netherlands**

Inspired by the belief that career guidance is a crucial element for sustainable employability, in 2014 the trade union CNV Vakmensen created 'James' - an independent private company, and wholly owned subsidiary. There are 15 career development professionals employed by James, supported by freelance advisers on a flexible basis.

In 2019, James supported around 5000 construction workers, cleaners, shop assistants, metalworkers, bankers, and workers from other sectors. James' mission is that everyone in the Netherlands has lifelong access to good quality guidance. To reach this goal, James works along two 'tracks':

1. The delivery of individual guidance normally by a career coach, and sometimes by a union learning representative. This is not limited to members of the trade union or current employees on traditional contracts; support is offered to those on flexible employment contracts, and during voluntary transitions or lay-offs. This service consists mostly of a combination of interviews and digital assessment tools to develop self-knowledge and opportunity awareness. Conversations to stimulate career awareness may happen on the shopfloor. The main goal is to help people to reflect on their current situation and develop a career action plan. Possible outcomes include modification of a job role to better fit the individual (jobcrafting), or access to training.
2. Structural activities that complement career service delivery and provide systems to support career self-management. This includes the operation of training funds to support workers to prepare for job changes.

A key feature is the *James Individual Learning Account*. Workers receive their own budget for development, which they can take with them and deploy from one employer to another over the years. They can freely choose routes that do not serve their job or current company or boss, but their career and long-term goals. Agreements negotiated with employers and labour market sector organisations incorporate support to access career checks and career advice.

James encourages service users to be autonomous and take responsibility for their careers, by supporting self-navigation including access to digital services, and strengthening and developing career competences. This is backed up by the safety net of support from an adviser if a service user has questions or concerns.

### **Union involvement in career education for young people attending learning institutions**

The involvement of employers (and employer associations) in education is a long-established facet of career education, and of wider work-related curriculum activities, and is seen as good practice. If anything, these activities have grown in importance in recent years with the emergence of evidence suggesting that substantial employer input to schools leads to long-term benefits to pupils (e.g. Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2017; Mann, Rehill, & Kashefpakdel, 2018).

A striking feature of career education is the relatively low level of effort put into balancing the interests of the demand side of the labour market with those of the supply side. The focus is on learning to adapt to meet the requirements of the demand for labour; not on defending one's interests in the supply of labour. The point here is not that employer input should be reduced or replaced; far from it – it is an essential and valuable element of effective career education. Rather the issue is the need to recognise that employers' interests are not identical to those of young people. This is true even where employer engagement in education is motivated not just by the instrumental need to recruit workers, but by a sense of social responsibility and commitment

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to educational values. There is a power asymmetry in employment relations which is problematic to respond to as an individual (Healy, 2004).

The institutional interests of trades unions are also not identical to those of young people, but they are well placed to balance the input of employers, and bring a concern for social justice and worker welfare to the table. Unions receive little attention in the career education policy and practice literature, certainly substantially less attention than employers. The increasing concentration of young people in precarious work offering low wages and poor conditions means there is a growing need for entrants to the labour market to be equipped to navigate modern employment contracts. Young workers need to understand the risks they face, their rights, and the sources of support available to them. To adapt to current learning needs, career education must address these issues, and unions can support educational institutions to do this in a variety of ways including direct teaching input, or the development of up-to-date learning materials and resources.

Specifically, young people need to understand the drawbacks of flexible working in terms of reduced employment protection (such as access to sickness absence pay or maternity/paternity entitlements). Contemporary ideology in career education has reified flexibility as a universal route to career success in uncertain times. Exposure to the risks of flexibility are greatest for socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and for young people:

Everyone should have the chance of a decent job and career, no matter what their age. But young people are most likely to experience unemployment, underemployment, low wages, casual and temporary work, zero-hours contracts and workplace exploitation. They are also least likely to be in a trade union, know their rights or have the skills or the knowledge to demand more from their employers.

(TUC, 2017, p. 1).

An additional contribution that unions can bring to career education is to help young people see that individual action is not the only way to improve their working lives, and that some career development issues

are best addressed by collective action (Healy, 2004). Our second case study relates to proposals rather than current delivery models, but is worthy of inclusion as the rationale behind it directly relates to the arguments presented above.

### Case Study Two: Unison in Scotland

Unison is currently the largest trade union in the UK, and Europe's largest public service union. Unison Scotland believe there is no place in Scotland's economy for unfair work characterised by precarious employment, low pay and abusive work practices. This is particularly the case in relation to learning, training and employment support.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is Scotland's national skills body and contributes to sustainable economic growth by supporting people and businesses to develop and apply their skills. SDS is also the national provider of career services (SDS, 2019), and the majority of its career advisers are members of the Unison SDS branch.

SDS and Unison have a mutually shared aspiration to make SDS an exemplar fair work employer. Fair work as it is understood in Scotland has five dimensions: effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect (Fair Work Convention, 2016), and incorporates recognition of trade unions. These aspirations go beyond the internal employer /employee relationships. They also relate to SDS interventions in the skills and labour market.

Every secondary school in Scotland has a linked SDS adviser and a service level agreement negotiated and reviewed annually. Services include both group work and individual guidance to develop career management skills. Unison SDS Branch are seeking to develop and pilot in partnership with SDS a lesson for senior phase pupils to be delivered in the autumn of 2020 by careers guidance practitioners. The focus of the session will be to raise pupil awareness of the principles and applications of fair work in the world of work. The sessions will:

- equip school leavers with an understanding of their rights in any future employment relationship, and
- enable them to develop the awareness and confidence to identify, challenge, call out and

reject workplace practices that fall short of the fair work principles, throughout their working life.

Equipped with this knowledge, school pupils will be better placed to make decisions about their future employment opportunities informed by an understanding of fair work criteria. The interactive lesson will include case studies for pupils to discuss using video footage of realistic scenarios experienced by young people in the workplace. The videos are to be created in partnership with the wider trade union movement. These will draw on the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC, 2019) 'Better than Zero' resources which address issues of precarious work. This approach is intended to generate group debate, discussion and evaluation of each scenario from a fair work perspective. The activity is also informed by guidelines from the STUC (2018) '*Unions into Schools*' initiative.

## Challenges and dilemmas for practice

These case studies offer some ways forward, but it would be naïve to think that practice in this field is unproblematic. Some of the challenges and dilemmas are explored in this section.

There can be tensions between the role of service provider and activist (Haak & Post, 2018). Unions have a long progressive-radical tradition, and there are advocates for radical action in the career guidance movement (e.g. Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2017), but activism naturally produces friction. Good and sustainable relationships with partners and stakeholder organisations underpin effective career service delivery so a delicate balance must be struck. Union advisers will not automatically be trusted by employees, let alone employers, and may have to establish credibility with young people and teaching staff in educational institutions.

The issue of who pays for the career development activities undertaken by trade unions cannot be avoided. As membership organisations, a strong case can be made that members fees should be directed solely to services for those members. This position might undermine an aspiration to wider social responsibility, in the form of offering career services to young people in education, or to potential new workers. This concern

might be mitigated by the need that unions have to reach out and engage with the workers of the future, to raise awareness of their services and to recruit new members. Other sources of funds for services might potentially be available from employers, from government, or from industry sector bodies. Going forward this will be essential to sustain the support for skills training offered by James, for example. Funding is welcome, but may also introduce another agenda (such as directing people towards skills shortage areas) which may be in tension with individual worker's interests and trust in union advisers.

Two general perspectives on the politics of trade unionism are important for understanding this possible tension. The first perspective opposes any political role for trade unions beyond servicing the immediate needs of union members - negotiating wages, hours of work, processes for airing grievances and so forth. The second (dominant) perspective suggests that trade unions and social democratic political parties have distinct but complementary spheres of influence: economics is the realm of the unions and politics the realm of the party. Taken to their logical conclusions, both these perspectives might limit the role unions might play in careers education for young people, an activity which is unavoidably political.

In the case of James, the service is striving towards supporting workers to become autonomous, and self-navigate their careers. This position is consistent with much contemporary thinking on career management, which has been critiqued as a neoliberal 'responsibilisation' of workers to adapt to the labour market conditions imposed on them (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2017). In fact, the challenges facing James' service users are often more prosaic: many workers find the labour market too complex to self-navigate, struggle with the digital skills required, and are not at a point where they could engage in effective peer support. It is possible to offer *both* individual support *and* collective support (Healy, 2004). One-to-one helping - the historic function of guidance services - continues to have a vital role to play. Individual support can complement group level activities, and needs to continue while collective routes to action (such as consciousness raising, political engagement, and empowerment through education) are developed.

## Conclusion

With a recognition of growing economic inequality and unequal access to decent work, the international career guidance community has renewed its focus on social justice, and begun to challenge the neoliberal assumptions underpinning its practices. The resulting academic discourse has been both fertile and radical, but largely conceptual rather than pragmatic.

We argue that trade unions represent natural allies for career services. Unions occupy a unique and occasionally powerful position, at the intersection of individual support and collective influence. They share the concern to promote access to decent work, and they have considerable practical experience of addressing social justice issues in the workplace through collective action. They also engage in individual support and guidance activities.

Unions face problems and choices if they engage with issues of career development. They must determine if their services will solely be to support current (fee paying) members, or if they will accept a wider social responsibility, or a quasi-political role. Engagement with young people in education potentially becomes more attractive to unions if they can promote union membership whilst also raising awareness of workplace justice issues. Career services routinely facilitate employers to access pupils and students in educational institutions, and support their recruitment activities. In the interests of balance, and to educate young people about their rights, careers services should also actively support trade unions to communicate with young people in career education contexts.

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# Change it up, change the system! Exploring career development learning and social justice through action research

Anne Delauzun

**Careers** practitioners are encouraged to embrace social justice as a core value, but to what extent can it truly guide practice given the operational and institutional constraints within which many operate? This paper presents a practical example of a career development learning intervention drawing on theories of social justice. Informed by student consultation, the workshop engaged participants in collaborative learning on themes such as the gig economy and the gender pay gap. This innovative example of a non-deficit approach succeeded in attracting and engaging a diverse group of participants, fostering peer-to-peer and transformative learning.



## Introduction

A great deal has been written about the relationship between career education and social justice, and whilst many helpful theoretical concepts and questions are raised (for example Irving, 2010; Bassot, 2012; Sultana, 2014), there is a dearth of practical examples of how such ideas might be implemented in context (Arthur, Collins, Marshall & McMahon, 2013, p. 137). I undertook some action research as a small step towards remedying this situation. The following article offers insights into the practicalities of developing a career development learning (CDL) intervention informed by social justice, and the successes and learning that resulted.

## Rationale

Social justice is perceived by many as a key component of careers guidance practice (Arthur et al., 2013; Christie, 2016). If careers guidance can enhance social

justice, as has been argued (Sultana, 2014, p. 317), the way in which this guidance operates will surely depend on the interpretation of social justice adopted by its practitioners. Whilst a large proportion of higher education careers services offer targeted initiatives for groups of students who are likely to face barriers to entering the labour market (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services [AGCAS], 2018b, p. 22) for example, many prominent examples of these (e.g. ACGAS, 2018a) appear to align with a progressive approach to guidance (Watts, Law, Killeen, Kidd & Hawthorn, 1996/2016, p. 174). This assumes that 'the individual's interests are best met by seeking to achieve the highest level that is possible within the status hierarchy of the opportunity structure' (Watts et al., 1996/2016, p. 174). There are clearly many benefits to this strategy (AGCAS, 2018a). However, it could also be argued that such approaches risk an uncritical adoption of a deficit model, in which career problems are located within individuals, doing little to 'address social conditions that adversely impact people' (Arthur, Collins, McMahon & Marshall, 2009, p. 23). The primacy of competition is another feature of this progressive approach, and indeed one promoted by the team within which I work, where students are encouraged to 'compete for success in the graduate labour market' (The University of Reading Careers Centre, 2018). Drawing on a radical approach to career guidance (Watts et al., 1996/2016), Hooley offers an alternative to this within his framework for emancipatory career education, asking the questions: 'How does the world work? How can I live with others? [And] how do I go about changing the world?' (2015, p. 15). Informed by this perspective, I set out to explore how to raise awareness of alternative and varied means of self-actualisation that serve the interests of the 'common good', as well as the individual (Sultana, 2014, p. 14).

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This work also offered an opportunity for increasing student engagement with careers support (a continuing concern in higher education settings) by appealing to a new and different audience. For those possessing a strong orientation towards the labour market and high levels of agency, what Hooley identifies as a conventional approach to career education (2015, p. 15) appears to be a good fit. Otherwise, however, the appeal is less clear. Law too argues that a new model of careers support is needed to best support this significant group (2009, p. 4). An approach to CDL that considers alternative narratives could perhaps encourage a broader definition of success, including scenarios in which fulfilment and self-actualisation are achieved by means other than a 'graduate job' or even paid work.

Through the process of action research, I set out to answer the following three questions, and the remainder of this article outlines my responses.

- 1) How can I design a career development learning intervention informed by perspectives on social justice?
- 2) What can I learn about my practice from delivering a career development learning intervention informed by perspectives on social justice?
- 3) Reflecting on my responses to these two questions, what are the implications for practice?

## Designing a career development learning intervention

I designed the CDL intervention through a process of triangulation, drawing on a number of key sources and concepts, my own experience as a careers professional, and student input gathered via a small-scale consultation. Key literature informing the work included Learning Work: A critical pedagogy of work education (Simon, Dippo & Schenke, 1991) - helpful in its practical application of the critical pedagogy theories of Freire, Giroux and others to the context of careers or work education; 'Socio-Political

Ideologies in Guidance' (Watts et al., 1996/2016), in which the political nature of careers education and guidance is discussed; and Career Guidance in Communities: A Model for Reflexive Practice (2017), in which Thomsen takes the collective, rather than the individual, as a starting point for careers education and guidance. Mignot's (2001, pp. 93-4) conceptual framework for anti-oppressive practice provided a helpful representation of some of the discourses of social justice and, critically, the tensions between them. I used this in the CDL intervention as a means of conceptualising some of the ideas and themes arising from the group discussion on the subject of the gig economy. Mignot's (2001, pp. 94-95) WISE principles for day-to-day anti-oppressive practice also informed the way in which the workshop was designed and delivered. The WISE principles, WISE being an acronym for 'Welcome, Image, Support and Empowerment', offer a form of 'practical politics' (2001, pp. 94-95) to guide the work of careers practitioners, engaging 'both the fundamental and the strategic questions that relate to anti-oppressive practice' (2001, pp. 94-95).

## Student consultation

Collaboration is an important element of action research and involving students in the design process also mitigates against what Mignot (2001) describes as associational injustice – people having things done 'to them' rather than playing an active role in the solution themselves (p. 94). Ensuring the workshop was relevant to students was important in increasing its appeal, especially given the perhaps unfamiliar nature of the topic. The experience of relevance also has a bearing on if, and how, people participate in careers guidance (Thomsen 2017, p. 8), which I have certainly observed as a practitioner. In order to be experienced as relevant, Thomsen suggests career guidance should provide 'a context for action in which participants join forces with career guidance practitioners to analyse, problematise and create new and shared opportunities in relation to their future educational or vocational participation in society' (2017, p. 8).

I undertook a consultation by interviewing (individually) two students (described here as Students A and B) who responded to a call for volunteers. Thomsen suggests discussion with participants as a

form of exploration through which relevant themes to guide the design can become apparent (2017, pp. 14-15), and this was the key aim of my consultation. I developed an interview guide with suggested questions to explore participants' awareness and understanding of social justice in the context of careers, incorporating clarifying and summarising questions as a way of building in some light analysis to the interview and to verify my interpretation (Kvale, 1996). This approach proved successful in eliciting a 'lightbulb moment' of transformative learning from Student B: 'We're just given the resources to go into the world how it is, we're not given the resources to change it...change it up, change the system!! – I think that's really important!'.

When asked about their understanding of social justice in relation to career, both interviewees raised the topic of diversity of role models, particularly in the context of their university and broader education experience. Student A commented on their observed lack of working-class backgrounds or regional accents in those teaching classes or workshops, whilst student B asked 'Oh, ok...where's all the females? Aren't I supposed to be inspired to be like you, but...there's no-one like me there?'. This theme recurs throughout both conversations and suggests a lack of visible, relatable, or 'flesh and blood' role models (Law, 2009). This has wider implications for the work of careers practitioners in general. A second prominent theme emerging from the consultations was the idea that lack of information, resources and tools was a barrier to action. Parallels could perhaps be drawn here with Bates' example of students seeking a programme to meet their 'socially structured' concerns of local labour market and salary information (1990, p. 74), when careers practitioners attempted to move away from a focus on information. This was taken account of in the design of the CDL intervention, with the inclusion of some content relating to specific information and resources, in order to meet this perceived need.

## The workshop

The input from the consultation was balanced with my own ideas (as the facilitator) so that 'taken-for-granted ways of thinking' could be challenged. The outcome of this triangulation process was the following two-hour

extra-curricular workshop, delivered in June 2018 and made available to all students at the University of Reading:

**Title:** 'I want to make a difference': Social justice and your career

**Aim:** To increase understanding of social justice as it relates to career, and inspire action to promote it.

### Learning outcomes:

- 1) Interpret two contrasting narratives about the labour market.
- 2) Discuss the potential impact of these narratives on themselves and others.
- 3) Apply strategies of individual or social change ('playing the game' or 'changing the game') to a labour market problem.
- 4) Compare the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies.
- 5) Propose actions they can take to promote social justice through their career.

All materials needed to deliver the workshop including a session plan, slides and handouts are now freely available online (Hooley, 2019).

## Delivering the workshop: successes

### Mitigating against associational injustice through collaborative design

Conducting a consultation informed the content of the workshop and, to some extent, mitigated against associational injustice. The broad appeal and relevance of the workshop could be evidenced by diversity of participants (in terms of ethnicity, level and subject of study, and gender) - a larger group than average for the time of year. All of those who gave feedback (15 of the 16 participants) reported enjoying the workshop, and all but one reported that they had found it relevant. One participant approached me at the end of the workshop to thank me, commenting how she hadn't realised that the Careers Centre offered workshops on this theme and how she thought it was important that they did. This feedback also emphasises the

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innovative nature of this workshop, particularly when viewed in contrast with the workshops around CV writing and interview preparation with which careers services are perhaps more widely associated and which are commonly more instrumental in nature. Encouraging students to engage with a topic in a deeper, more critical way, as this session did, is perhaps more closely aligned with the way in which students learn within their academic disciplines. I believe this parity is important if career development learning is to be viewed as credible and relevant by *all* students.

### Achievement of aim and outcomes through collaborative learning

The overall purpose of the workshop was to 'increase understanding of social justice as it relates to career and inspire action to promote it', and I believe that broadly, this was achieved. A striking feature of the student feedback is the extent to which participants valued the collaborative approach. One commented that 'the session was engaging and the debate was a great strategy to promote participation from the students. It encouraged creative and critical thinking', another that 'it was really good to have the time to talk things over in groups'.

Observing the groups as they prepared for this debate on the gender pay gap (individual change versus societal change), and as it was conducted, I noted several salient points being made. Those arguing for individual change proposed schemes to increase women's confidence, negotiation and networking skills. Improvements to government-funded childcare provision and advocacy for more equitable sharing of parental responsibilities were argued for by the societal change group. Education was cited by both groups as a valuable tool for furthering their respective causes. My colleague, who was observing the session, reflected to me later how, enabled by the structure of the workshop, she observed the group 'gain their own momentum' (T. Lyden, personal communication, June 6, 2018), suggesting progress of a group who, for the most part, didn't outwardly appear to be motivated to take action at the start.

Everyone appeared to participate in the reading and discussion of two contrasting newspaper articles on

the topic of the gig economy, and the innovative use of contemporary mainstream news articles (Denham, 2018; Jones, 2018), proved particularly effective in highlighting the wider relevance of the topic beyond the classroom. I witnessed students describing the authors' use of emotive language, the way in which images were used to enhance a particular narrative, and the citing of research to support an argument. Conversations I overhead in the groups suggested transformative learning was taking place. It seemed that many participants hadn't previously considered the broader implications of what they, as consumers of ride hailing apps such as Uber and Lyft or food delivery services such as Deliveroo or UberEats, had experienced as cheap and convenient services.

At the end of the session, all participants described the actions they planned to take to promote social justice following the workshop. The specific detail included in some of these actions offered a strong indication that these had been well-considered. Examples included 'Look into HeForShe and Lean In movements. Have a discussion with my friends, (especially male friends) about social justice and gender equality' and 'Find out the gender pay gap in the property industry'. This first example is particularly noteworthy as the HeForShe campaign was introduced to the discussion by another workshop participant. To measure Praslova's 'Behaviour Transfer' criteria (2010), I contacted all participants via email five weeks after the workshop and two responded to confirm that they had indeed followed through with actions.

Towards the end of the session I observed several students explaining to their peers with some passion and enthusiasm about specific causes or movements with which they were already involved or familiar with. Others appeared to be noting down names and details or asking for more information. Both the resulting actions and the process through which they were produced is further evidence of the success of the collaborative elements of the session design. As Simon et al. suggest, the sharing of information and discoveries made that take place through collaboration mitigates against constraints on learning such as time and access to information (1991, p. 16). This also offers an opportunity for participants to 'join forces and enjoy mutual support' (Thomsen, 2017, p. 13).

# Delivering the workshop: Challenges

## Harnessing the affective dimension of learning

Interestingly, participants were reluctant to share their personal feelings about the issues discussed with the wider group during the article comparison exercise, and no responses were forthcoming when I asked the group for their personal feelings on the topic of the gig economy. In the 18 months since I delivered this workshop the theme of the gig economy, and the broader concept of decent work, has been tackled in mainstream television and film – for example in *Years and Years* (Davies & Cellan Jones, 2019) and *Sorry We Missed You* (O'Brien & Loach, 2019). Although fictional, the latter is based on extensive research into the lived experiences of those working in the gig economy (Poirier, 2019) and as such offers a valuable reference point. My colleague observing the session suggested that more exploration of, or focus on, the affective element could have perhaps increased motivation, and commitment to action (T. Lyden, personal communication, June 6, 2018). A key point of reflection discussed in our debrief conversation was whether the workshop could have been structured, or delivered, differently to accelerate this process, and therefore increase the likelihood of action. In repeating this session, I would look to increase the emphasis on affective elements, perhaps by encouraging feelings to be shared anonymously, or by further personalising the debate activity with a family scenario, for example.

## Facilitation

Throughout the workshop I encountered dilemmas around how to facilitate, e.g. how far to challenge, question, or give my own viewpoint and which themes or ideas to explore further. Simon et al. propose the classroom as 'a site for the interrogating of competing claims to truth' (1991, pp. 17-18). However, at times it seemed that perhaps because some assumptions were so deeply rooted, or because the variation in experience was more limited, some truths were accepted uncritically. An example of this was a discussion on encouraging men to take a greater role in caring for dependents. Whilst participants agreed that employers could encourage this by promoting shared parental leave opportunities, there was no

recognition of the structural barriers that are likely to impact on the actual take-up of such opportunities. As a working parent myself, I have experienced this first-hand. I realised that I had expected participants' prior awareness of such issues to perhaps be more developed than the contributions suggested, and, on reflection, I questioned whether I should have shared more of my own lived experience with the group. This balance between giving power and ownership of the discussion to the participants, versus providing more input as the facilitator to expose tacit assumptions felt complex to navigate when there was a clear political dimension to the discussion, given the widely-held view that careers practitioners should remain impartial. In discussing this theme with other careers professionals, I encountered deeply-held views on both ends of the spectrum.

## Implications for practice

### Working within communities

Running these workshops within pre-existing communities could increase impact and engagement (Thomsen, 2017), particularly given Law's argument that 'students' [...] career management is more influenced by what happens between them and the people they spend the most time with' (2009, p. 2). In higher education, this could be achieved by partnering with student-led societies. Previous research into the impact of peer influence on career behaviour (Delauzun, 2016), and experience of delivering other careers workshops in partnership with student-led groups (e.g. Delauzun, 2015) suggests that these collaboration initiatives often succeed in reaching those who were not actively engaging with other careers service provision. At a national level, delivery within existing communities could be facilitated through partnership with relevant student-facing organisations such as UpReach, the Sutton Trust, or Student Hubs. At the time of writing, I am working with colleagues in the Careers team in partnership with RUSU (Reading University Students' Union) staff and sabbatical officers on Social Impact Week. This week of workshops and events is designed to stimulate interest in, and increase understanding of, jobs and career paths offering potential for social impact. Taking inspiration from the individual versus societal change debate, a member of my team is co-delivering

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a workshop as part of RUSU's Student Representation conference. It will be interesting to evaluate the impact of this partnership, and to what extent engagement increases as Thomsen suggests (2017).

### Curriculum input

Given that 'a fairer society' is one of the purported aims of the Department for Education's (DfE) Careers Strategy (DfE, 2017, p. 3), I believe that workshops such as this could make a valuable contribution.

The Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 includes learning opportunities around different types of work and workplace rights and responsibilities, changing patterns of employment and attitudes and values in relation to work and enterprise (PSHE Association, 2017, pp. 29-31). There is clearly some alignment between these and the workshop I designed and delivered, and therefore embedding a version of this work into a PSHE curriculum could helpfully contribute to schools' and colleges' ability to meet the Gatsby benchmarks, as required by the Careers Strategy (DfE, 2017).

### Beyond formal education

There is also scope for the workshop to be adapted for delivery with groups outside the formal education sector altogether, building on Law's ideas around pre-vocational franchise (1986). A growing number of organisations in the private and not-for-profit sector work with people of all ages on various aspects of careers and work-related learning for whom this topic could be usefully explored. Given that recent research into the future of work has predicted that by 2028, 'societal responsibility will decide between the life and death of an organisation' (Deutsche Telekom, Detecon International and Henley Centre for Leadership/Henley Business School, 2018, p. 12), the learning from this research could in fact be applied in any work-related environment. The authors propose 'human-centricity' as 'a necessity to address societal divisions and inequality gaps and create sustainable societies' (Deutsche Telekom et al., 2018, p. 12) and workshops such as this could offer a simple first step for organisations beginning this journey.

## Conclusion

Through this research I have reflected on the shortcomings of a system and taken practical steps to improve it, and in doing so contributed an innovative example of critical praxis to the literature (Hammond and Wellington, 2013, p. 37). I have learnt much about my own practice and feel this process has made me more acutely aware of the political nature of careers work and the potential influence of my own political sensibilities on my current role and indeed my future career. I have found myself more readily questioning graduate recruiters and employers' approaches and explanations and listening with a more critical ear to the career and labour market stories I encounter. Sultana describes social justice as 'an unquenchable thirst that keeps us ever on the alert...for more equal, more equitable, more just, more fair social relations' (2014, p. 322). Through sharing and discussing this research with others within and beyond the realm of careers work, I have been heartened to meet many who share this thirst.



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# 'He who is silent is taken to agree': University careers services and the problem of unpaid graduate internships

Helen Buzdugan

**Unpaid** graduate internships (UGIs) are a controversial feature of the UK graduate labour market. Drawing on Watts's socio-political ideologies, this article examines how university careers services and practitioners engage with this issue in policy and practice, using data from interviews with careers managers and practitioners. It reveals that practitioners are sometimes reluctant to engage directly with the ethical issues surrounding UGIs, and that some careers interventions which support individuals may arguably help to perpetuate this unfair practice. I contend that careers professionals nonetheless have a moral duty to take action on UGIs, putting ethics at the heart of their work.

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## Introduction

The Sutton Trust recently reported that, while government figures estimate that there are 'up to 70,000 interns in the UK at any one time', '51% of employers fail to pay their interns at least the adult minimum wage' (Monacute, 2018, pp. 1-4). For university careers professionals, UGIs present a moral dilemma. Despite the widespread sense that they are unfair, some practitioners view them as a 'reality of the labour market', considering that (as client-centred professionals) they have a duty to inform their clients that unpaid work may be necessary to succeed in the most competitive sectors. And recent debates on social justice in careers practice in the academic literature (notably Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2018 and 2019), have yet to make a tangible

impact in most careers services, which are busy juggling their commitment to students and graduates, their relationships with employers and the increasing pressures of internal and external employability metrics.

This article contributes to both the literature surrounding unpaid internships and the growing body of work on social justice in careers practice, by examining the relationship of careers services with UGIs through an 'ethics' and 'justice' lens. It draws on empirical data from my unpublished master's dissertation, which questions whether UGIs are unfair from a moral perspective, and explores how careers services and individual practitioners engage with this issue, using Watts's four socio-political ideologies (1996) as a framework. In this research, I exposed some of the underlying ideas, values and beliefs which can inform individual practitioners' stances and actions in relation to UGIs (sometimes on an unconscious level), as well as practices which may adversely impact the UGI issue in unseen ways.

My aim here is to explore some of the findings from my research, and to put forward some possible recommendations for careers services and practitioners who wish to engage effectively with the issue of UGIs.

When citing my data in this article, I refer to interview participants as 'Interviewee 1' etc.

## Watts's socio-political ideologies

Tony Watts drew attention to the highly political nature of careers work, arguing that:

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[Careers education and guidance] operates at the interface between the individual and society, between self and opportunity, between aspiration and realism. It facilitates the allocation of life chances. Within a society in which such life chances are unequally distributed, it faces the issue of whether it serves to reinforce such inequalities or to reduce them.

(Watts, 1996, p. 351)

To illuminate the role of careers practitioners in reinforcing or reducing inequalities, Watts outlined his four socio-political approaches to careers education and guidance (see table below).

**Table 1: Four socio-political approaches to careers education and guidance**

	<b>Core focus on society</b>	<b>Core focus on individual</b>
<b>Change</b>	Radical (social change)	Progressive (individual change)
<b>Status quo</b>	Conservative (social control)	Liberal (non-directive)

Source: Watts (1996, p. 227)

I use Watts's theory as a framework for analysing careers services' and careers practitioners' engagement with UGIs, as it illuminates the ways in which values, decisions, activities and interactions with different stakeholders are not politically neutral. Rather, they are inextricably linked with what happens in the labour market, and have a direct and indirect impact on the future of graduates, individually and collectively. It is for this reason, I argue, that what careers services and practitioners say and do with regard to UGIs matters, and should be subject to moral scrutiny.

A brief outline of the Watts framework will set the context for the rest of the article. Both the 'liberal' and 'progressive' approaches focus on the *individual*. The 'liberal' approach emphasises *individual choice*, while the 'progressive' approach focuses on *personal growth*. Traditionally, Watts (1996, pp. 352–3)

contended, careers guidance has been characterised 'in *liberal* terms as a *non-directive* process [...] strongly influenced by the models of non-directive counselling developed by Carl Rogers (1961)' [italics in original]. Emphasis is on the freedom of the individual to make their own career decisions, with guidance facilitating that process. 'Progressive' (individual change) approaches in careers work include initiatives to raise the aspirations of students and graduates or to help them develop skills or gain experience to make them 'more employable', thus improving their chances in the labour market.

In an economic downturn, Watts argued, the ideas of 'choice' and 'opportunity' come under pressure, and the socio-economic backdrop against which career work takes place becomes more apparent, resulting in more 'conservative' type careers interventions, which could include promoting less desirable opportunities, and encouraging students to be 'more realistic' in their career ambitions. Finally, a 'radical' (social change) approach would involve challenging the current social order, by for example adopting an advocacy role for students and graduates, lobbying for change, or confronting unfair employment practices.

## Research methodology

Informed by a constructivist perspective, my approach was one of critical inquiry (Crotty, 1998, p. 157), since I sought to go further than simply exploring different viewpoints, and challenge commonly held assumptions, values and socio-political ideologies and structures.

Employing qualitative research methods allowed me to gain a rich understanding of the various ethical and moral perspectives on UGIs. I interviewed careers service staff whose job function brought them into contact in some way with the issue of UGIs. To select appropriate research subjects I used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Denscombe, 2003, pp. 15–6). I then conducted semi-structured interviews with heads of careers services, careers managers, careers advisers, employer engagement and placement practitioners at three different types of university in different geographical regions of England. My interview guide included questions covering the same broad themes for all participants:

- Views on UGIs and reasons for those views
- Views on the role of careers services and individual practitioners in relation to UGIs
- Examples of how informants had engaged with this issue in the past (e.g. in a guidance interview, advertising an internship opportunity, creating a policy document).

I also examined the formal policies of these institutions in relation to UGIs, as well as any relevant information on their careers website.

I then conducted a thematic analysis of the various ways in which practitioners engaged with the issue of UGIs, using Watts's socio-political ideologies as my framework.

## Forms of engagement with the UGI issue

UGIs touch on many facets of careers services' operation, and my interviewees discussed aspects ranging from vacancy advertising policies and advice on internships on the careers website, through to conversations with employers regarding their recruitment practices, how careers advisers address UGIs in guidance and the provision of bursaries for unpaid work experience. My findings showed careers service engagement fell mainly within the 'liberal' or 'progressive' Wattsian categories, with a few examples of 'radical' approaches. None of my interviewees had adopted an intentionally 'conservative' ideological approach. Nonetheless, there were instances in which careers activity risked becoming unintentionally 'conservative', as I will illustrate in the following sections.

### **The 'liberal' approach: We will give you all the information you need and then you can choose your own path**

Several of my interviewees talked of students and graduates being 'grown adults', and stressed that the role of the careers service and individual practitioners was to provide the necessary information regarding UGIs, and then to allow clients to make their own choices. One service had a page on its website on

unpaid work experience. This provided information for students about the rights of workers and the national minimum wage and advice about how to assess whether the experience will be useful and avoid exploitation, leaving the reader to make her own decision. This chimes with Watts's 'liberal' socio-political approach, as it 'holds to the ideal of respecting and valuing the right of individuals to make their own informed decisions' (Watts, 1996, p. 353).

One careers manager explained she felt her service was justified in advertising UGIs of up to four weeks in duration, because resourceful graduates could 'work on the weekends, work evenings' and 'find solutions' for that period of time (Interviewee 1). In her view, this was a reasonable choice for graduates to make. Her stance was arguably 'liberal' – a belief that students were free to choose or reject this course of action – it was simply a question of motivation. It could also fit with a 'progressive' (individual change) approach, emphasising individuals' need to push themselves (with careers service support) to do whatever is necessary to achieve their career aspirations; in this case, undertaking a UGI.

Many of my interview subjects with a student-facing role also referred to the tough economic climate or highly competitive nature of certain sectors. They emphasised the importance of presenting a *true picture* of the labour market to clients, so they didn't have unrealistic expectations of what was required to get into their chosen career. One careers adviser explained this uncomfortable situation thus:

In the current climate, if we said to students: 'Our advice is don't do unpaid placements', I'm not sure that's really helping them when they're going to be up against people, if we're talking about the creative sector, who have done unpaid work experience. It's a very difficult one for us.

(Interviewee 2)

These comments suggest that the responsibility of careers practitioners is chiefly to ensure their clients are fully informed of their rights and options, then leave them to make the right choices for themselves. The phrase 'knowledge is power' springs to mind. It also chimes with careers advisers' commitment to impartiality in careers guidance. However, some clients,

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particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may feel they cannot realistically afford to take up UGIs (so, not a choice at all). If, for example, a careers adviser suggests that it may be difficult to break into journalism without doing unpaid work, her client may feel her only option is to give up on that career aspiration altogether. According to Watts (1996, p. 353), one of the criticisms of the 'liberal' approach is that it 'masks inequalities in society by making them seem matters of individual choice'. Thus, in attempting to present a 'true picture' of the current situation regarding UGIs, but not challenging the status quo, careers advisers may risk veering towards a more 'conservative' approach, inuring individuals to what they see as the reality of the graduate labour market.

However, careers professionals are very well aware of the structural barriers in the labour market faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and every careers service in my study had put measures in place to try to help them.

### **The 'progressive' approach: *We know the labour market is unfair, so we're offering this to help you boost your employability***

The Office for Students (OfS) requires universities to submit plans setting out 'how [they] will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education' (OfS, 2020).

Several of my interviewees referred to tailored initiatives instituted by their careers service for students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds, which aimed to create a more 'level playing field', enabling those students to obtain some of the advantages enjoyed by more privileged students. These ranged from dedicated events for WP students (e.g. workshops focussing on confidence building and alumni networking events) to bursaries for WP students undertaking unpaid or low paid work experience.

These can be seen as examples of a 'progressive' approach, in that they focus on improving the career prospects of the individual students or graduates who participate in them. Such schemes were clearly very popular with both students and staff. However, some

interviewees reported that participation in these opportunities by WP students was variable, and that, realistically, only a relatively small percentage of their university's WP student population would access and benefit from them. This brings to mind one criticism of the 'progressive' approach, namely that 'encouraging some degree of movement of individuals within the status hierarchy merely reinforces the hierarchy itself, with no benefits for those who remain at the lower levels of it' (Watts, 1996, p. 354). In other words, these initiatives – while they undoubtedly help the individual students and graduates who participate in them – do nothing to change the system.

Moreover, in providing these bursaries, careers services could be accused of endorsing and helping to perpetuate the unfair practice of UGIs, and even unwittingly contributing in a small way to reducing the number of *paid* graduate opportunities available (Pennington, 2010). Therefore, bursaries for unpaid work experience may serve to unfairly disadvantage those graduates without access to them in the graduate labour market. This links closely with Watts's other criticism of the 'progressive' approach: that it 'places more pressure on the opportunity structure by raising expectations which this structure may be unable to meet' (Watts, 1996, p. 362). It seems likely that, as long as graduates are driven to take on unpaid experience to give themselves an advantage, the UGI phenomenon will grow, with graduate recruiters often favouring candidates with the longest work experience. Because they cannot afford to work unpaid for lengthy periods of time, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds are left unable to compete.

### **The 'radical' approach: *We know the labour market is unfair, so we will help you to challenge injustice and play our part in trying to change the system***

If there are issues with liberal and progressive approaches, what is the alternative? In my interviews, there were only a few examples of practitioners who reported adopting a 'radical' approach (in Wattsian terms); for example, challenging employers directly over UGIs, or advocating on behalf of students or graduates who had been exploited. One careers adviser reported that she had advised a graduate of

her rights in relation to UGIs in a guidance interview and discussed with her how she could challenge her employer.

It is clear that these more ‘radical’ approaches come with their own risks for those involved. While many of the practitioners I interviewed were very well aware of the injustices surrounding UGIs, there was a sense that (irrespective of their personal views on the matter) challenging employers who wanted to offer UGIs on moral grounds was *professionally inappropriate* for them. In cases where they had to inform employers they were unable to advertise UGIs, most were more comfortable referring to their careers service’s policy and the national minimum wage legislation. For employer engagement staff, recruiters are key stakeholders, so maintaining positive relationships is considered of prime importance. ‘I don’t quite get into the moral side,’ one internship officer told me, ‘because that’s not a discussion for me on the phone with an employer’ (Interviewee 3).

Most of the careers advisers interviewed also felt it was not their place as careers professionals either to advise graduates to take action over an unfair UGI, or to personally act on behalf of individual clients or the broader graduate body. Just as graduates can be deterred from taking action against employers of unethical or illegal UGIs (perhaps from fear of being branded as troublemakers and ‘blacklisted’ in their chosen career sector), careers practitioners too are aware of this potential consequence for their clients. One careers adviser explained why she believed that even informing graduates about ways they could challenge employers over UGIs was a risky strategy, given the relative powerlessness of new graduates:

My fear is that you’re creating a rabble-rouser who has not yet started their career, and then is essentially trying to fight a system that will just drop them like a hot potato... Imagine the student going into a law firm or a marketing firm and saying: ‘See that internship you’re giving me, it’s highly illegal. I’d just like to point that out, and I’m going to sue you.’ You know, if it’s a small enough industry it’s a risk for them to challenge it, a massive risk.

(Interviewee 4)

However, if careers practitioners hear graduate clients’ experiences of exploitative UGIs without telling them how they can fight this injustice, they risk falling into a ‘conservative’ approach, ‘habituat[ing] entrants to the workforce to the requirements of capital’ and ‘reconciling people to their roles’ (Watts, 1996, p. 353). Thompson supports this view, claiming that advisers cannot ‘sit on the fence’:

There is no middle ground; intervention either adds to oppression (or at least condones it) or goes some small way towards easing or breaking such oppression. In this respect, the political slogan, ‘If you’re not part of the solution, you must be part of the problem’, is particularly accurate.

(Thompson, 1992, cited in Mignot, 2001, p. 117)

In my view, this compels careers professionals to take a stand on, and actively engage in, the *moral* issues surrounding their work, including UGIs, however uncomfortable this may be.

## Should careers services be doing more to tackle the unfairness of UGIs?

As we have seen, there are several understandable reasons why careers services and practitioners can be reluctant to take a stronger stance on UGIs, ranging from a belief that they have little power to impact this structural feature of the labour market, to concerns about being unprofessional and jeopardising impartiality or relationships with employers.

Moreover, outside pressures, such as the metrics of the Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey (at the time of my original research), can influence the stance of some careers managers towards UGIs, with one admitting: ‘Whether it’s a paid or unpaid internship, if it does happen accidentally to fall over the census period, we are capturing it as good DLHE and therefore it’s going to help us.’ (Interviewee 5).

Additionally, a number of practitioners in my study indicated that they felt ill-equipped to provide appropriate guidance to graduates regarding UGIs, or to challenge unfair employment practices, suggesting a

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possible training need for careers professionals.

However, interestingly, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Code of Ethics states that its members have a responsibility to 'address and challenge inequities where [they] encounter them' (AGCAS, 2020). This may suggest a more robust approach than simply not advertising UGIs or informing students of their rights regarding unpaid work.

Careers professionals should also reflect on whether upholding the principle of impartiality means 'accepting the rules as they are'. It could be argued that practitioners should develop a clear ethical stance and use that (rather than an unchallenged, inequitable status quo) as a basis for true client-centred impartiality. Moreover, by attempting to remain 'neutral' on the injustices of UGIs, careers professionals risk signalling to others that they do not have any moral qualms about them. (Note the maxim: 'he who is silent is taken to agree'.) Since the careers service may be viewed, by students, employers and colleagues in other parts of the university, as an authority on graduate careers and the labour market, such a message could have damaging consequences.

## Recommendations for more effective engagement with the UGI issue

There are a number of ways that careers services and practitioners could engage more effectively with this issue. Below are a couple of key areas which could be explored further.

### Direct intervention options – educating, challenging, lobbying and advocacy

While this would be a matter for discussion within individual institutions, careers services and practitioners could explore various direct intervention options, with the aim of challenging the unfair practice of UGIs at different levels of the system (i.e. at individual level, with groups or organisations, and at societal level). The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (STF), proposed by Arthur and McMahon (2005, pp. 208-222) provides a useful

basis for careers practitioners to 'consider multiple systems of influence' and explore ways to 'move beyond a[n exclusive] focus on individuals to a focus on addressing many of the organizational and systemic forces that have an impact on the career development of individuals'. The authors argue that, far from being powerless to change the system, through 'the dynamic process of recursiveness' and the interaction between system levels, small interventions by careers practitioners can have a big effect.

For example, in relation to UGIs, an employer may decide to pay her interns as a result of a careers practitioner making the ethical and business case for doing so (*lobbying*), or as a result of being *challenged* by a graduate who has been advised and coached by a careers practitioner. The employer's actions may then influence other employers to change their approach, setting a small ripple effect in motion across the system.

However, according to Arthur (2005, p. 144), 'careers practitioners often lack understanding about what it means to be an advocate and what kinds of activities might lead to social change'. My research findings also indicated a possible training need for some careers practitioners, which could be addressed through a tailored ethics and social justice professional development programme. Another positive move would be for careers services to inculcate a culture in which policies and practices are critically debated and challenged from an ethical and social justice perspective.

### Adopting a 'critical' pedagogy' approach to UGIs in careers education

While careers education and curriculum interventions were not mentioned explicitly in my interviews, it could be argued that a general focus on employability metrics could encourage an instrumental, or 'progressive' (in Wattsian terms) approach to careers education: in other words, a curriculum which aims to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to improve their employability, without challenging underlying socio-political structures. A more 'radical' alternative would be a 'critical pedagogy' approach (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2001; Simon, Dippo & Schenke, 1991). For example, careers education

modules which include a focus on work experience and routes into graduate jobs could engage students in critical discussions about the ethics of UGIs, how they are situated in the labour market, and their implications not just for their own career development, but also for their peers and society in general. Such an approach may prompt students to reflect more deeply on the wider implications of their own actions.

## Conclusions

It is clear that careers services are performing an almost impossible juggling act, trying to abide by the law and balance the needs of their different stakeholders – for example, individual students and graduates wishing to get into competitive sectors who *can* afford to undertake UGIs, and those who *can't*, the graduate recruiters they work with who wish to promote their opportunities, the wider university and government. This can lead to conflicts of interest, requiring difficult ethical decisions, which undoubtedly explains the eclectic mix of socio-political approaches adopted by services and practitioners in relation to UGIs.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach which careers services could adopt as a blueprint to engage with the issue of UGIs both ethically and effectively. Arguably, there is a role for most (if not all) of the Wattsian socio-political approaches in careers policy and practice, depending on the context. However, my research suggests that the more 'radical' approaches are currently under-developed in current university careers practice and merit further exploration.

To conclude, I would contend that careers services are not politically neutral entities; rather they are inextricably connected with what happens in the graduate labour market. Therefore they have a responsibility to develop policies and practices which help to tackle injustices within it. This means that, as well as helping our own students and graduates get ahead in the system as it currently is, we need to play our part in making the system fairer for all.



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# Place-Identity in boundaryless careers: Narratives of medical students from lower socio-economic class backgrounds

Emily Róisín Reid

Medical schools are working to widen access to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly through targeted recruitment within under-doctored regions of the UK. Drawing upon recent research, this article explores ways that place-identity theory can be helpful to career professionals, particularly when thinking about the extent to which where individuals are from influences where they (can) go and what they might need to sacrifice to get there. Bounded student narratives expose the 'dark side' of the social mobility agenda and clash with the quasi-colonial 'world is your oyster' rhetoric of the boundaryless career. Implications for practice are discussed.



## Introduction

The term boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994) has evolved from its original conception to connote a sense of free-market quasi-colonial freedom which exists in reality only for the privileged few; access to the 'highest professions' being one such example. It has been critiqued on account of an assumed agency that individuals have over their career decisions, overlooking structural and other barriers to choice of occupation (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). Fascinated with the opportunity structure vs. agency debate, the author led a research project relating to Widening Participation (WP) to medicine. The project sought to explore the barriers and enablers that medical students from lower socio-economic backgrounds encountered as they traversed boundaries in their

journey into medicine. This article looks at one specific emergent theme in the light of the current policy context; that of place-identity and the extent to which where you are from interacts with where you go. Implications for careers practitioners are explored, and contextualised within policy agendas.

## Context and definition of key terms

'Widening Participation' is the policy drive to make opportunities to enter and successfully progress within higher education (HE) and graduate-level employment more equitable, especially when accounting for under-represented groups (Boeren & James, 2017). Historically, student cohorts studying medicine have not been representative of the wider population. Some groups have been over-represented and some groups under-represented when accounting for ethnicity, gender, disability, and socio-economic background (Medical School Council, 2016). Medical schools are under increasing pressure to do more to widen participation into medicine (Sutton Trust, 2016), with governmental funding for allocation of new medical places going to 'cold spot' regions in the country, where population needs are underserved, in an attempt to recruit more students from widening participation backgrounds (Medical Schools Council, 2016).

Warwick's graduate-entry only medical degree (MB ChB) maintains a strong success rate at attracting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The sole entry requirements are that a student possesses a 2:1 at degree level from any institution, in any discipline. School-level achievements are

not considered, which allows the widest range of applicants to apply, such as those who have gone into Allied Health Professions, or into HE via Access/Foundation courses.

## The social mobility landscape: 'Where you are born [...] directly affects where you get to in life'

At its most rudimentary level, the social mobility agenda is concerned with the 'extent to which more or less economic status is transmitted across generations' (Goldthorpe, 2013, p. 7), with 'mobility' here commonly referring to an upwards trajectory within socio-economic status. However, there is also a regional aspect to social mobility. Former Education Secretary Justine Greening contended that: 'In modern Britain, where you are born, where you live, where you go to school and where you work directly affects where you get to in life. [...] Talent is spread evenly across this country; the problem is that opportunity isn't' (Government UK, 2017). Taken together, it is therefore assumed that social mobility (i.e. upwards trajectory) equals *talent + geographical opportunity*. In the light of place-identity, this article posits that talent is not in itself an independent variable, i.e. a 'genetic endowment'. Instead, it is the *sum of prior opportunity* or as Bourdieu (1985) asserts, the accumulation of capital; of latent knowledge passed on through generations, social networks and through profiting from economic resources that enrich these things.

The failure to recognise that talent is a function of opportunity perpetuates a system whereby 'outliers' can only beat the system by chance, as is explored later in this article. Importantly, one's place-identity can only be understood within the context of this accumulation.

## Place-identity, place attachment, regional identity

The study of place-identity (and related terms: sense of place, place attachment and regional identity) has been of particular interest in the fields of human geography, architecture and social science since 1970s (Paasi,

2002). Amid contested debate around definitions, place-identity essentially contends that a person's identity forms in relation to their environments. Further, that there is a recursive relationship between the places that people inhabit and their subsequent imprint on an individual's identity and vice versa, and thus the manner in which these incrementally inform socially-constructed identities of surrounding communities (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983). That places have an 'identity' of their own is assumed, but on deeper analysis it is our (socially-formed) imprints on these which create and perpetuate this. Paasi contends that: "Regional identity" is, in a way, an interpretation of the process through which a region becomes institutionalized, a process consisting of the production of territorial boundaries, symbolism and institutions' (2002, p. 478). How this occurs is contested; notably the degree to which this is a centralised process through structural engineering (i.e. the design of new buildings, cultural points of reference, community hubs) or whether this is, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim contend, increasingly driven by people taking agency and independently shaping their environments (2001).

Ralph defines places as 'significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world' (1976, p. 141) and proposed the terms 'insideness' and 'outsideness' to determine a person's relationship with their environment (1976). He contends that the more 'inside' of a place a person feels, the more safe, at ease, less stressed they will feel and they will assimilate their identity with that place. If a place feels more hostile, or alien, Ralph articulates that a feeling of 'outsideness' will cause the person to disassociate with that place. Seamon and Sowers assert that the 'crucial phenomenological point is that outsideness and insideness constitute a fundamental dialectic in human life and that, through varying combinations and intensities of outsideness and insideness, different places take on different identities for different individuals and groups, and human experience takes on different qualities of feeling, meaning, ambience, and action' (2008, p.54). For those engaged in the field of careers, this work on place-identity resonates when considering the impact that a person's environment has on the development of their identity, and consequently, what career options are perceived to be 'in scope' or 'out of scope' for that person.

## Methods

This article presents one small extract from a large two-year exploratory research project looking at the career narratives of medical students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The study consisted of two phases. Phase I gained benchmarking data via a quantitative survey with qualitative insight questions, which was completed by 46% of the student population ( $n=326$ ). Phase II consisted of a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews ( $n=22$ ) and two focus groups (participant  $n=13$ ). Given the inherently complex phenomena under observation when considering identity construction, socio-economic background and career choice, the chosen epistemological basis for this exploratory research was one of social constructionism. The primary research question was underpinned by a theoretical framework foregrounded by key sociological texts, such as Bourdieu's 'Forms of Capital' as critical in understanding some of the issues that are prevalent in the Widening Participation arena, in addition to key career theories: Law's Community Interaction Theory and Hodkinson's Horizons for Action. However, during the course of data analysis which followed Braun and Clarke's six-point framework (2006), it was clear that a more data-centred and inductive approach to coding and analysis would be helpful in understanding some of the emergent themes. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was chosen as a means by which to do this, as it crucially acknowledges the researcher's role in 'making sense of people's making sense of phenomena' (ibid). Emergent findings also stimulated an iterative search back to the literature.

## Findings and discussion

### Feeling 'out of place'

The impact that the internalisation of place-identity can have on individuals appears to be borne out in one particular phenomenon that has been described by Relph as 'insideness and outsideness' (1976). One of the emergent themes was that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds felt 'out of place' at medical school. Not a single WP student in this study reported feelings of 'insideness' or feeling 'at home'.

In contrast, individual narratives explained the extent to which medical school felt alien to them, citing relationships with peers, finance, and self-efficacy belief as contributing factors to this. One student described his first encounter with this environment at a medical school interview:

I've never felt so out of place in my life - the boy from the north east, from a council estate with people who had gone to all the top private schools in the country; different manner of speaking; different everything; different prep; different things that we would talk about; just didn't seem to have anything in common at all.

(Male Participant, Interview)

The word 'different' repeated here emphasises for this student how stark the contrast was, and how 'outside' the environment was. Interestingly, for this student, it was clearly an environment within which he wanted to feel 'inside', and yet he struggles to reconcile what he is aspiring towards with his former identity:

Even if you wanted to change to that, you couldn't depending on where you were from because you'd change to that to try and fit in where you want to go to but if you do that, you're not going to fit in where you are. It's difficult to escape I think.

(ibid)

This raises the question: what does it take to become a doctor, in terms of one's own identity? What should it take? What must be left behind and is anything preserved? For students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, coming to medical school is essentially a 'crossing the Rubicon' moment, after which it appears that there is no turning back in terms of the implications for their own identity. In the light of the rhetoric of the social mobility agenda, the prevailing assumption that making opportunities available to people from underrepresented backgrounds will help nullify or counterbalance the system; where in fact what appears to be happening is that people compromise their own identity, including the element of where they come from, in order to fit in and conform to this system.

## People like me don't become doctors

Student narratives reveal the strain of having to reconcile their place-identity with what they believe to be the required identity of a doctor. The result presents as imposter syndrome, with all students (even those due to shortly graduate) feeling that they do not belong at medical school. When asked at what point medicine became a tangible career option for them, one respondent said, 'I'm still waiting for the "sorry we've made a mistake"'. The narratives portrayed a reality where students find it difficult to feel like they belong at medical school, nor are they able to assimilate with what they understood the 'identity of a doctor' to be:

I think there is that attitude of – I don't know where this attitude came from – people like me don't become doctors. [...] I do think it's probably just that I was the first person to go to uni, nobody else was particularly academic. All of the people had good jobs, like my mum was a nurse but back then you went to college, you didn't go to university to do it. I think as well – I can't remember if I brought family in to it very much but things like I was in a single parent family, not particularly well off. In my head at that point it was 'that's not the type of person that becomes a doctor'. That type of person could become a nurse, that type of person could become successful but not one of the higher professions that people think of like doctor, lawyer, architect, those were all still a little bit out of reach.

(Female Participant, Interview)

In this narrative, the student is clearly trying to make sense of where that belief originated from, and fails to rationalise out what has essentially become embodied from a history of unconscious nudges to support this belief formation. The students' narratives reveal numerous such influences from concerned family members, teachers, careers advisors, and even tropes of what doctors are (or are not) as portrayed by TV. However, one concerning factor is that medicine is ubiquitous as a career choice; doctors are everywhere, but the perceived identity of what it is to be a doctor is not apparently something that feels open to

everyone. More alarmingly, there appear to be socially-informed stereotypes as to what a doctor is 'like' which need critical revision.

## Accent

Recent research by Donnelly, Baratta & Gamsu (2019) demonstrates that those from lower socio-economic groups often feel the need to downplay their accents to be perceived as more successful and this was borne out within many of the student narratives. The desire to fit in at medical school causes them to purposefully choose to downplay or lose their regional accents, in favour of acquiring a more generic accent: 'I was state educated and not from the best area, although my accent doesn't show that these days.' One student reflected on the impact accent can have to how she was perceived within her peer group:

I went on a rock climbing trip with some final years that graduated last year and I took along my best childhood friend from my town/village area, very strong northern accent, very working class, and we turned up to, like, go camping and climb together, and they just kept looking over, like, what's going on, and they were, like, how did you two meet?" I was, like, "We've been best friends since childhood," and they were, like, "What? What do you mean?" I was, "Yes, we grew up together;" and they were, like, "But, you're posh," and I was, like, "No, I'm not," and it's that, sort of, like, difference. I don't know. Like, everyone there was just... yes. It was just different. Like, a lot of those expectations are, sort of, like, I don't know. People, like, interpret you differently depending on how you speak.

(Female Participant, Interview)

It is interesting that she does not recognise herself as 'posh', and retains a piece of her place-identity in her strong association with where she was brought up, despite relinquishing its objectification in her accent. Her reaction to her peers referring to her as 'posh' is interesting, in that she clearly disassociates with that as not being part of her identity, however at some point, her disassociating with her accent was important enough a consideration. One is left wondering, was this out of desire or necessity? Another student observed a lack of role models 'like her':

I remember when I used to go to my doctor's appointments when I was a kid I was in Liverpool and I was, like, why does no-one have a Liverpudlian or, like, northern accent. I wonder if they were northerners. [...] when I was younger, I had a very strong northern accent but I changed it, because people, instead of listening to what I would say, would be, like, "Where are you from?" and people assume you're stupid, as well. Well, not assume you're absolutely stupid but, instead of actually listening to your words, they don't take you seriously as much, I found.

(Female Participant, Interview)

Her observation 'I wonder if they were northerners' seems to imply how widespread this phenomenon is; and yet the fact that she has done the same is once more maintaining a status quo of doctors having felt the need to minimise their accents.

## Implications for practice

These student narratives reveal that although they have 'made it' into medicine, they have done so at considerable personal cost to themselves and their sense of place-identity, against the odds of a system which appears to have been stacked against them. Often acting as the interface for transitions, careers practitioners can assume the powerful role of helping individuals navigate their way around or within such systems. We often take for granted the value of giving practical information and giving labour market advice, but sometimes the messages that we give to our students/clients are so important because they run contrary to the potent super-narratives that script their career decisions, i.e. 'people like you *can and do* become doctors. Here's where you can find out more'. Furthermore, the unendingly powerful belief in our client's potential and the unconditional positive regard which we impart may help to annul the systemic negative feedback they gain from sources around them (i.e. a lack of observable role models from their own region, negative feedback from their communities and networks, contact with 'outsiders' e.g. peers from privileged backgrounds etc.). Understanding place-identity can help careers professionals enter a client's frame of reference, and enable them to understand how they relate to their environment; why they feel

more at home in some environments, and more alien in others. Anticipating some of the feelings that students might face, careers professionals could enable individuals to reflect on their own place-identity, and how this interacts with their perceptions of careers being in or out of scope. A group session around the theme of 'insideness and outsideness' could effectively challenge students' perceptions of outsideness through peer-dialogue, and equally serve to normalise some of the feelings that students may face (for instance, at medical school interviews as per narrative above), and begin to enable students to prepare for these.

It is becoming increasingly important for careers professionals to reflexively consider their response to social justice and weave this into their practice, as highlighted through the recent work of (*inter alia*) Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen (2019). Here, this might take the form of advocating on behalf of students either directly, or through developing their reflexivity so that they can take a more proactively planned response to considerations relating to their identity and subsequent responses (e.g. maintaining their accent), as one small step to attempt to destabilise old systems. It might also require careers practitioners to engage in more collective advocacy on behalf of under-represented groups to challenge the status quo (e.g. fairer admissions processes, more diverse portrayal of doctors in the media).

## Conclusion: Social mobility, 'A cold and broken Hallelujah'?

Place-identity can offer career practitioners a lens through which they can gain critical insight into the barriers that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds must overcome to enter higher education, and (here) the medical profession. Careers professionals have a powerful role to play, not only through the 'butterfly effect' impact that one small guidance intervention can have on affecting the wider system, but in advocating on behalf of our clients individually and collectively as a profession.

This article would like to conclude by stimulating debate relating to the 'dark side' of social mobility.

These students have ‘succeeded’ in the eyes of the social mobility agenda, but at what cost? If these students feel that they need to change who they are to fit in, it appears that widening access is currently serving to perpetuate and support the current system, which creates more of the same rather than celebrating the diversity that comes from place-identity. Furthermore, this comes at great cost to the individuals who feel that they cannot ever return, and do not fit in where they are.

In the words of Leonard Cohen, these narratives do not reflect a ‘victory march’, but a ‘cold and broken hallelujah’ (1984). This research only looked into students who were successfully admitted to medicine, however what about those who were ‘left behind’? Further research is needed, in particular using the lens of place-identity to explore career decisions in regions where attainment is low, or the lens of place-identity using critical race theory. In conclusion, careers professionals are well positioned to take on the mantle of helping individuals to carefully navigate these systems, and have a valuable role to play in advocating social justice. It is crucial that they recognise this role and rise to this challenge.



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# Maintaining the promise without killing the dream: Developing resilience for future 'graduate' careers

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**Significant** numbers of recent graduates continue to enter non-graduate roles. Against this backdrop, there is a need to consider how students and graduates can be prepared for the graduate labour market. Resilience is represented as a key attribute for successfully navigating this challenging and complex labour market. Drawing on empirical research with higher education careers practitioners, we examine approaches to supporting graduates in developing 'resilience' against a backdrop of competing stakeholder priorities. We highlight the challenges of acknowledging transition experiences that are counter to dominant notions of successful graduate outcomes. We advocate support for practitioners to provide realistic insights into the graduate labour market.

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## Introduction

Against a backdrop of increasing scrutiny on the value and performance of UK higher education institutions (HEIs) (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016; Office for Students, 2019) and the particular emphasis on their role in developing employability and preparing all students for future careers, there are reports of graduates being disillusioned with the realities of work, their career expectations being unmet and increasing numbers describing themselves as underemployed. Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that in 2017, 47% of recent graduates (those who left full time education within five years of the survey date) were employed in

non-graduate roles.<sup>1</sup> This figure is subject to significant regional variation with rates above 50% in Scotland, Wales, the North East and the North West and rates of 35% in Inner London. There are also significant disparities within regions – for example, the rate in the West of England Combined Authority (which includes Bath, Bristol and South Gloucestershire) is 38.2%, compared to 55.1% in the rest of the South West (ONS, 2018).

Whilst there are debates over how graduate/non-graduate roles can be defined and measured (Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2011), these ONS figures suggest a significant number of recent graduates are experiencing some form of underemployment. Previous research has highlighted that when graduates find themselves in such circumstances they may come to frame their experience in ways which might have long term negative effects, reducing the likelihood of them achieving a 'graduate career' and preventing them from engaging in career behaviours which would help them capitalise on their experiences (Blenkinsopp, Scurry and Hay, 2015; Scurry and Blenkinsopp, 2018). The notion of a 'graduate career' or 'graduate job' is not uncontested. There is significant debate in the literature about how this can be defined and understood. We acknowledge these debates but for the purpose of this research we understand a 'graduate career' as an expectation held by individuals and society of a career 'commensurate' with the investment in education. How this is understood, measured or evaluated will vary, but it is often

<sup>1</sup> Defined as roles which are associated with tasks that do not normally require knowledge and skills developed through higher education to enable them to perform tasks in a competent manner. Examples of non-graduate jobs include receptionists, sales assistants, many types of factory workers, care workers and home carers (ONS, 2018).

conceptualised using objective markers of salary (for example discussions about the 'graduate premium') or occupational classifications.

Underemployment is a major feature of many graduates' early careers, and this presents a considerable challenge for higher education careers practitioners, as they look to prepare students to manage early employment experiences which may be 'suboptimal' to their own, or others' expectations in a context where labour market outcomes are seen as a key performance indicator for demonstrating the value of higher education for individuals and society. There is a need, therefore, to consider how HEIs can prepare graduates to make connections between their early employment experiences and their future careers, so that in the face of unmet expectations and/or 'sub-optimal' labour market outcomes, they might utilise these experiences to develop and advance their careers.

The role of higher education careers practitioners in providing guidance for students in higher education and helping to develop 'graduate employability' is widely acknowledged. This role is often presented as providing insight into the labour market opportunities, helping with job search and communicating the importance of, and supporting the development of, employability and career management skills (Clarke, 2017). However, Irving and Malik (2005) argue that this is only a partial aspect of career education and counselling – and that those engaged in careers education and counselling have a role to play in promoting alternative and critical perspectives to challenge 'the value-laden ideologies of the global labour market' to enable individuals to 'explore alternative visions and develop their own understanding of career' (Irving and Malik, 2005, p. 5). In doing so careers education and counselling needs to acknowledge the complex and disjointed experience of work and the inequalities inherent within this – for example unemployment, underemployment, low pay, job insecurity and job satisfaction (Athanasou & Perera, 2019). Christie (2016) highlights that the experiences of higher education careers practitioners are increasingly characterised by 'professional turbulence', as roles evolve to focus from in-depth relational work to a focus on breadth, with institutional context both enabling and constraining advisers. To date however,

there has been limited critical exploration of the experiences of individuals providing careers guidance and support in HE.

## Graduate career resilience

Resilience as an academic concept grew to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s through the development of 'positive psychology' (Block & Block, 1980). Within this literature, resilience was understood as a resource to negotiate an adverse or challenging environment resulting in a positive outcome for the individual. The concept has been understood either as a stand-alone phenomenon or sitting alongside other traits/qualities including adaptability, determination, recovery and hope (Taormina, 2015; Filbay, Bishop, Peirce, Jones & Arden, 2017; Rees, Breen, Cusack & Hegney, 2015; Chow, Tang, Chan, Sit, Choi & Chan, 2018). In their systematic review of graduate resilience, Burke and Scurry (2019) argue for a non-hierarchical interconnected system incorporating; adaptability, goal re-setting, recovery and self-efficacy.

A common theme running through the various definitions of resilience is the focus on the individual, with resilience being understood as 'hardiness' or 'grit'. As a consequence of the highly individualised character of resilience, there is a clear argument that resilience is something which can be taught or developed (Jackson, Firtko & Edenborough 2007), potentially inflating a deficit model of resilience. Alongside the established focus on the individual, there have been developments toward considering the role of contextual factors and social structures (Turner, Scott-Young & Holdsworth, 2017; Ungar, 2011).

Within his ecological model, Ungar (2011) provides four principles for such a conceptualisation of resilience. The first principle is decentrality where, while research still examines the individual/group, the external environment is also considered. The move away from the subject-centred focus also allows, Ungar argues, for a broader understanding of levels of responsibility. The second principle is complexity and an acceptance of the complex nature of social space when constructing research questions and considering avenues of influence. Ungar provides an example of complexity when suggesting that resilience can be

temporal in nature; while it is present at one point of life, this is no guarantee that it will be continuous, particularly due to changes in context, both personal and environmental. In addition, Ungar maintains that an acceptance of complexity allows for an understanding of the equifinality of outcomes (many different starting points leading to different but desirable ends) – helping research to move beyond a deficit model. The third principle is atypicality and a move away from a binary understanding of outcomes. The final principle is cultural relativity and considering the cultural specific context in which resilience is played out, often requiring an understanding of accepted norms and legitimate forms of navigation and negotiation. For Ungar, this navigation and negotiation is a combination of individual agency and structurally-facilitated access to resources required to insulate an individual or group during times of adversity.

Since the early 1990s a resilient workforce, characterised by continuous professional development, responsibility for career self-management and adaptability to the changing requirements of the market, has been identified as a key factor in an organisation's success (Waterman, Waterman & Collard, 1994). Career resilience is defined by Mishra and McDonald as 'a developmental process of persisting, adapting and/or flourishing in one's career despite challenges, changing events and disruptions over time' (2017 p. 218). As such career resilience is concerned with how individuals manage their own career trajectories rather than focusing on how individuals recover from adverse employment experiences. In line with broader discussions concerning resilience, career resilience is understood as a resource that can be developed and supported. A range of studies have advocated the benefits of including resilience training within educational programmes for a range of future careers including teaching and the medical profession (Mishra and McDonald, 2017). However, Bimrose and Hearn (2012) are cautious about the developmental character of career resilience as a lack of such resilience could be unfairly framed as a personal failing, without considering the broader structural influences.

University graduates are a key cohort impacted by the career resilience narrative. Graduates are increasingly expected to enter the labour market with substantial

levels of resilience in which to negotiate employment, underemployment and unemployment. An issue within the sub-field of graduate career resilience however is the focus on a small number of professions, most notably teaching and the medical profession (Burke & Scurry, 2019). In addition, research is often concerned with avoiding burnout once an individual is in a position and not the career resilience required to secure a position.

There are therefore specific issues concerning resilience within the graduate labour market including: economic hardship, social discomfort and goal re-setting in the context of underemployment and unemployment leading to self-exclusion from the graduate labour market (Burke and Scurry, 2019). Articulating these specific transition challenges experienced by graduates allows us to move beyond understanding resilience as a resource to avoid burnout when in employment; it is also a key resource required to insulate graduates as they attempt to navigate the labour market in the absence of employment and the associated resources/comforts such as reliable income and social status. Locating the need for resilience to mediate the juxtaposition between subjective expectations of the labour market (in part created by the university system) and objective realities provides the rationale and defence for providing undergraduate students with a realistic and practical account of graduate life. This approach does not stand in opposition to raising student aspiration, but provides a means to protect them in the long term. Returning to Burke and Scurry's (2019) composite model of graduate resilience, a key barrier in developing these components is an understanding of the labour market and, in particular, the need to develop resilience. Although the concept of resilience has been defined reasonably precisely and consistently in the academic literature, resilience is also a word in everyday use, and as such is open to many different interpretations (cf. Ma, Blenkinsopp & Armstrong, 2020) by different stakeholders. It is therefore important to be aware of these different understandings, and the present study focused specifically on examining how higher education careers practitioners understand and apply the concept of resilience in their practice.

## Methods

Data were gathered using 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews with higher education careers practitioners from six universities in the North East of England and Northern Ireland. Access to the different units was agreed and facilitated by the heads of each careers service. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed for data analysis. Participants' data was anonymised, and confidentiality ensured in this and all other research outputs. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data.

## Findings

In the analysis of the findings two key themes emerged. Firstly, practitioners were concerned that stressing the importance of resilience risked communicating a negative and pessimistic view to an already anxious student body. This concern was located within a broader recognition within HE careers practice of the tension between articulating a realistic picture of graduate careers and potentially discouraging student aspiration. This tension arises in part from the extent to which the sector had emphasised a dominant narrative of graduate success (e.g. the graduate premium). This linked to the second theme emerging from the data, the organisational barriers to preparing graduates for uncertain labour markets. We shall now discuss each of these in turn.

### Striking a balance between optimism and realism

A key barrier career practitioners experienced in raising student awareness of the likely challenges and setbacks graduates will experience when negotiating the market was that it went against the dominant narrative of success.

There is an awful lot of peer pressure in terms of making applications and in going to the right employers and getting the right jobs and how much salary [...] and there's a lot more chat about careers in general, it's just got a higher profile um and I think that does make students more anxious about what they're going to do next and a lot of that is self-imposed pressure and peer pressure.

A number of participants discussed their concern about the potential negative association that students would make if the need for resilience was emphasised. Participants likened such discussions as 'preparing students to fail' and 'lowering expectations'. As a result, there were very limited discussions with students concerning negative outcomes for graduates.

Through the emergence and establishment of the knowledge economy, universities have situated themselves as a central actor within the economy and justified policies such as increased tuition fees through the graduate premium (Burke, 2016). This is coupled with students identifying increased life chances and employability as a key factor in reading for a degree. In the context of performativity culture within the neo-liberal higher education system (Naidoo & Williams, 2014), university staff (including careers practitioners) are pressured into meeting student expectations and continuing this human capital narrative, that investing in personal resources (education, skills, networks etc.) will foster higher levels of career capital for individuals that result in financial and social rewards (Brown and Wond, 2018). Such a perspective aligns with the attitudes of participants and echoes previous findings from Russell-Watts and Stringer (2018) where careers practitioners resisted 'using language of failure and setbacks' to challenge the dominant narratives of success.

The friction between career practitioners' approach to best practice and the need to take a proactive approach has been discussed by Hooley (2015), who maintains that adopting the stance as a neutral arbiter in an unequal system complicitly reproduces those relations. In this context, supporting a narrative of success and of the graduate premium without providing a critical discussion on the nature and reality of the market denies 'soon to be' graduates the opportunity to understand the need for resilience and to avoid short-term reactions to adverse career experiences such as self-exclusion. We suggest the dilemma participants describe, of pushing against the human capital narratives of success and neo-liberal expectations of performativity, may be alleviated by the eventual end result of higher returns on student investment and increased levels of graduate employment.

Importantly, for practitioners there was a hesitancy in embarking on such an approach without greater institutional support:

As an institution I think it's [thinking about resilience] a massive piece of work to be done - we are very context dependent as a service, we can't be that effective unless the infrastructure's around us and the university works as well.

Practitioners highlight that isolated priorities and potential contradictory messages, between university departments, are a significant barrier in developing resilience. Practitioners need the support from a range of university staff to both transmit and reinforce a singular message but perhaps more importantly to support each other as they question the dominant human capital narratives within higher education.

### **Organisational barriers for practitioners in preparing graduates for uncertain labour markets**

A key issue within participants' accounts was the challenge of the 'self-selecting' nature of students' engagement with the services they offered. Whilst it was acknowledged this was the most feasible approach, given the number of students and the resources available, the effectiveness was questioned. As one participant highlighted, even for students that do engage, 'encounters are brief with little opportunity for follow up'. Whilst many spoke of embedding offers within programmes as a way to broaden reach, it was noted there were challenges in engaging with academics to achieve this.

Participants also highlighted how a range of organisational factors compounded the challenge of opening up students to the possibility that they may need to prepare for entering employment that fails to meet their expectations, or in which their skills and knowledge are not utilised. These included the resourcing of careers and employability services, the changing nature of HE careers service provision and an emphasis on performance metrics (institutional, service, individual). This was epitomised by the following respondent:

I often see my job as you know, er, like a juggler, you're juggling lots of different balls and

sometimes those balls are different colours so someone says, okay make sure you don't leave that blue curveball so it's making sure, even if you drop any it's making sure that ball is not missed. [...] It's meeting some expectations, it's meeting staff expectations as well and, with [University X] being a very small team often you are doing similar things, similar KPI's which are matched by let's say a team of 50 people at other places.

One individual spoke of the need for the 'right ecosystem' to be in place to provide effective support for students but felt the 'people with purse strings and the strategists...[their] attention is elsewhere' and although 'we know [students] respond very well to one to one [sessions], resources are being allocated to IT systems and automation'. This challenge of resourcing, and competing against larger strategic infrastructure projects for investments was most acute in the accounts of practitioners from post-92 institutions. This observation echoes previous arguments from Naidoo and Williams (2014) that post-1992 institutions are vulnerable in a neo-liberal context and are required to more fully engage with performativity culture to ensure a reproduction of their institutional capital.

This changing nature of the job and wider pressures left practitioners feeling that they had little space to reflect on current debates and challenges as they were busy being responsive and 'doing the day job'. Although institutional context and practice provided challenges for respondents, they could also play a role in enabling practitioners to support students and develop resilience. Respondents highlighted the value of existing practices supported by their institutions, including; credit bearing skills development modules and extra-curricular employability awards. However, this institutional support varied across the institutions represented in the study, and respondents highlighted academic support and buy-in for such activities as crucial in determining their success. In addition, respondents discussed the desire for greater institutional support in the form of dedicated training on tools and activities which support the development of resilience. Respondents were aware of some 'tool-kits' that were available but discussed the need for support in selecting the most appropriate combination for their students.

## Conclusion and implications

The graduate labour market is complex and highly variegated, with very different entry routes and career pathways depending on such diverse factors as degree subject, target occupation and/or sector, university, location etc. This contextual information is important for career practitioners and students, and will have very different implications in terms of resilience. Students seeking to enter a line of work which is known to be highly demanding but for which there is an acknowledged skills shortage need support to develop resilience in dealing with in-work pressures. Whereas students seeking a career in a field in which supply routinely exceeds demand (e.g. performing arts) need support to develop resilience in coping with the job search, and potentially underemployment or even unemployment.

Our data suggest career practitioners recognise that resilience takes various forms and will need to be supported and developed in different ways for different students. This requires the development of an evidence base, as well as space for practitioners to develop tailored interventions. This forms part of a wider agenda for careers and employability practitioners seeking to develop more critical understandings of the likely challenges within the graduate labour market. However, as our findings demonstrate, career practitioners face a dilemma of balancing realism with optimism against a backdrop of individual, organizational and societal expectations of successful graduate outcomes that both enable and constrain their practice.

One way forward would be to draw upon the idea of 'threshold concepts' (Land, Meyer & Flanagan, 2016), defined as 'ideas that act as conceptual gateways to transformed understandings of the ways of thinking and practising within a discipline or field of study' (Irving, Wright & Hibbert, 2019, p. 357). It would be of great benefit to graduates to have a basic 'theoretical' understanding of the nature of careers, and of the labour market, as this would enhance their career resilience. An understanding of careers and the labour market is recognised as improving students' preparedness for the graduate labour market (e.g. Burke et al., 2020), and in terms of resilience, even a basic understanding of supply and demand in a labour

market context provides graduates with a basis for putting their short term experiences of unemployment or underemployment in context, thus making the situation easier to handle emotionally, and also allow them to develop better strategies for moving on.

Treating career and the labour market as threshold concepts has several benefits for practice. First, the approach can be readily fitted into existing institutional arrangements, in particular curriculum based approaches to careers and employability. Second, by helping all students gain an understanding of these concepts practitioners can avoid the risk of being seen to be lowering students' ambitions. Finally, it provides a basis for graduates to become, and remain, reflective learners when it comes to their own careers.

Clearly introducing such a process requires institutional buy-in, to allow for critical and realistic discussions and also for a greater focus on the long term benefits of fully preparing graduates. In the context of short-term metrics in the UK higher education system, universities have reproduced the image of a 'work ready' graduate, one who is ready to cash in on their graduate premium once they have processed across the graduation stage. In an effort to maintain the promise of opportunity for increased life chances and to support the development of a critical and socially aware cohort without killing the dream, we argue that students and graduates need to be at a realistic starting point to develop career resilience in support of reaching these goals.



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*Maintaining the promise without killing the dream...*

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# Responding to career uncertainty: Applying a 'dual-empathy' approach to career development using corporate strategy theory

Naeema Pasha

We live in rapidly changing times, with workers continuously facing challenges as organisations go through repeat and rapid transformations. Furthermore, literature on Future of Work, including the rise of artificial intelligence in the workplace, predicts greater levels of occupational hybridisation and contingent working, which will further increase job uncertainty. This paper argues that by drawing on theory and practice from organisational literature, career practitioners can appreciate better the impact of organisational change on work, and the implications of this for people's careers. Thus, in understanding both organisational and individual transformation, they can offer a 'dual-empathy' approach to career practice.

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## A changing world of work

*'People need to prepare for changing work tasks, not assume that occupations will remain stable.'*

Gothard (2001, p. 24)

University career services, both in the UK and globally, are considered the key facilitators of employment outcomes, as student employability and thus graduate employment forms a fundamental aspect of key performance indicators at higher education institutions. Careers teams are under growing pressure from students and universities to deliver exceptional careers development results for students, as well as to meet employer skills expectations - which are mounting in demand and complexity (Tomlinson, 2012). Furthermore, governments repeatedly address

the graduate skills agenda and voice concerns on shortages and skills gaps, emphasising the importance of industry skills needs and impact on productivity. Recently, Philip Hammond, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer in the previous UK government, suggested that the current slowing of productivity in the UK is partly because companies are not developing new skills at a pace to enable the effective adoption of emerging technologies. He argued that employers need to respond rapidly in order to be internationally competitive and meet the economic challenges of a changing world of work, (Gov.UK Speeches, 2018). Similarly, Shaffer and Zalewski (2011) argue that the current labour market requires a newer approach from careers teams, to support new graduates to gain entry, arguing the skills needed to manage a career in a new world of work are very different than were expected even a decade ago. These skills are, to a certain extent, different to current employability skills because the nature of work is predicted to be dissimilar due to the rise in automation, machine learning, and robotics (Schäfer, 2018). According to Shaffer and Zalewski (2011, p. 64), the shift from certainty to uncertainty is growing and has meant a different approach to career thinking, arguing:

From the beginning of the last decade of the 20th-century American business and industry noted that fundamental forces of change were reshaping the employment realities of the knowledge-driven, post-industrial economy.

Shaffer & Zalewski (2011, p. 64)

Lo Presti et al (2018) also highlighted the changes predicted in the economy in their study, including a greater number of jobs that are temporary, contingent,

hybridized and nonlinear, thus reflecting an increasing diversification of the workforce and organisations. As such, personal attributes and skills needed to work in a labour economy experiencing greater flux is now an increased requirement in career self-management (Bimrose, Barnes, Brown & Hughes 2011).

## Career delivery for a VUCA world

It is important that modern service delivery for career and people development should acknowledge that a career, an organisation, and people are all subject to unexpected change. Consequently, asking people to 'choose and follow' a certain career path becomes irrelevant, given that certainty in careers may either disappear or change beyond recognition. Commentators such as Baruch (2004) suggest that workers in modern-day society are now subject to a multiplicity of changes within a 'Volatile Uncertain Complex Ambiguous' (VUCA) world and consequently career delivery needs to be modernised. VUCA is an 'organisational' related term as stated by Kinsinger and Walch (2012), to describe a changeable corporate/organisation environment. Shaffer and Zalewski (2011) also contend that new graduates are now entering a VUCA environment. Indeed, Shaffer and Zalewski claim that many graduates will face frequent job changes and they suggest career skills need to be adapted accordingly;

In a VUCA work environment, job security does not result from having a job, but from purposely and self-consciously maintaining a currency of skill and special knowledge that assures employability.

Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011, p. 69

They further suggest that the last 20 years of careers advice practices have supported graduates for permanent secure roles within traditional careers, with their job-offer of lifelong security and opportunities for financial success. They argue that this model of delivery is no longer valid in a new VUCA labour climate and therefore career practitioners should look towards newer methods of delivery. This paper argues that one such field to consider is *change strategy* drawn from corporate and organisational literature. This field

draws on theory and practice of how organisations adapt to change, and this paper argues that theories such as *Dynamic Capability Theory* (Teece et al. 1997) that examine change and adaptation from a macro 'organisation level can translate to micro 'worker' level and as such can offer valuable concepts for career development application.

## A dual-empathy approach to careers

A considerable portion of current careers literature is focussed on 'the individual' and not on 'the employer'. This is because the literature on careers is often drawn from psychological and educational work which focusses on the individual, rather than corporate organisational literature – despite workers carrying out their careers 'in-situ' within organisations. However, it could be argued that as career development is a lifelong pursuit and careers occur within organisations, consequently careers practitioners ought to consider in more detail the impact of the organisation on careers. Indeed, many authors such as Inkson and King (2011) call for a 'dual empathy' approach for career development describing this approach where:

Individuals look at their careers through the lens of personal advantage and consider how their careers may provide opportunities to optimize earnings, status, personal development and family life, both immediately and in the long term.

Organizations consider those careers through the lens of organizational advantage and note that the careers of their staff may give them a means of maintaining or enhancing expertise, corporate culture and institutional memory as sources of long-term competitive advantage.

Inkson & King (2011, p. 38)

As such, this paper argues that both careers, and indeed HR practitioners working with employees on their career development, should move toward a delivery model that supports individuals to develop their career paths in a way that ensures they adopt adaptive qualities and skills that are in 'dual empathy' with organisations trends.

An example of dual empathy is the development of talent attraction schemes and talent development

## Responding to career uncertainty: Applying a 'dual-empathy' approach...

programmes that are designed more explicitly to meet the aims of an organisation (in its plans for success and growth), and also acknowledge an individual worker's career expectations, offering workers more agency over their career development.

This rationale draws on corporate literature and mirrors that of how organisations maintain a competitive advantage by adopting a change-oriented approach, as described in the *Dynamic Capabilities* theory. This approach advocates that a more 'fluid' way of approaching career development is needed to also meet employer requirements as well as that of the individual, thereby proposing an inter-related stance by addressing both organisational needs and worker needs.

### Dynamic Capabilities - a dual empathy method of managing change

Dynamic Capabilities is an academic field that offers empirical support on how organisations gain competitive advantage (Teece et al., 1997). Dynamic capability research considers factors that enable an organisation to adapt to its environment to achieve success, sustainability and robustness. The concept of dynamic capability as outlined by major proponents in the field state:

Dynamic capability is the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments.

Teece et al. (1997, p. 509)

Dynamic capability essentially relates to an organisation's strategic ability to adapt, evolve and remain competitively advantaged in an unpredictable and unstable VUCA world. Therefore, dynamic capabilities are different to an organisation's *operational* capability, which relates to the day-to-day running of an organisation (such as administrative, legal and operational duties), whereas dynamic capabilities relate to the *directional* planning of an organisation. Leading proponents such as Teece et al. (1997) argue that by effectively applying a dynamic capabilities framework,

an organisation will be able to create a short-term benefit - by which the continued application will build a longer-term competitive lead and thus be able to meet the challenges of a highly changeable world. Whilst the original framework was developed in 1997, Teece has since written substantially on this area and subsequently created a significant research body examining the impact of dynamic capabilities on successful outcomes across many industries - from international global tech firms through to small start-ups and public sector organisations. Teece notes, in all cases, despite the varying sizes and purpose of an organisation, the ability to adapt effectively to their environment is the chief factor in continuous success and in maintaining competitive advantage. His more recent studies highlight research on companies such as Apple, Google, and IBM as examples of firms who have adopted this dynamic framework model for growth and success. Teece posits that for an organisation to create and maintain a competitive lead there are three key attributes that enable an evolutionary approach and states three constructs that constitute the dynamic capabilities that organisations need to adopt:

- **Sensing:** this is an ability for a firm to develop insights into the world around them by understanding trends and behaviours
- **Seizing:** this is an ability for a firm to take risks where possible and seize opportunities for growth and development
- **Transforming:** this is an ability for a firm to enable change processes within an organisation to occur by transforming an organisation (both tangible; products and processes and intangible assets; skills and outlook) and to reconfiguring strategy and structure.

(Teece et al., 1997)

Whilst it could be argued that by adopting continuous change processes is costly for firms, commentators such as D'Aveni, Dagnino & Smith (2010) suggest by not doing so could lead to an organisation failing, as the need to embrace uncertainty and transformation is necessary in order to survive. An interesting case study cited in this field of research to demonstrate the success of a dynamic capability model is that of Samsung who have developed a successful business from an unforeseen start:

Twenty years ago, few people would have predicted that Samsung could transform itself from a low-cost original equipment manufacturer to a world leader... By the end of 2010, Samsung was selling as many smartphones as Apple. And by 2013, it had become the leading smartphone manufacturer in the world, with a 32% global market share. How did Samsung rebound so quickly? The key was dynamic capabilities. While existing research has emphasized cooperation among organizational units in developing new products and technologies, the example of Samsung demonstrates that competition among business units can also enhance a firm's dynamic capabilities.

Song, Kyungmook Lee, and Khanna (2016, p. 118)

## The key to dynamism is people

Teece (2007) asserts that a dynamic capability environment can only work if the people within it are able to adapt to it – and ideally for the whole firm culture to be open to change. Indeed, Teece argues that the whole of the organisation must gear its workforce to adopt creative and innovative thinking and then enable this to happen through creating effective organisational design, saying:

While certain individuals in the enterprise may have the necessary cognitive and creative skills, the more desirable approach is to embed scanning, interpretative, and creative processes inside the enterprise itself. The enterprise will be vulnerable if the sensing, creative and learning functions are left to the cognitive traits of a few individuals.

Teece (2007, p. 1323)

For career and HR practitioners this would suggest that there is a potential for consolidation of dynamic capabilities and employability by considering the skills needed to develop a *dynamic capability*. Indeed, according to Finch, Peacock, Levallet & Foster (2016), there is a strong relationship with dynamic capability and successful employability. It is argued the type of career behaviours that would enhance employability

includes being able to transform knowledge and learning into more effective career self-management (Finch et al. 2016). It is suggested that graduates would be able to improve their employability by adopting 'organisational-based' skills such as used in dynamic capabilities. Examples of dynamic capability competencies include: the ability to communicate well, being able to build effective relationships, being open to new experiences and being conscientious (Finch et al. 2016). Dynamic capability is dependent on worker behaviours of being able to connect and communicate with people in order to develop a shared approach to change. Indeed, Teece (2007) also suggests that 'Dynamic Microfoundations' (which include people skills) are needed for the application of a dynamic capability for a firm and outlines the critical microfoundations people-skills needed as:

- to be able to scan and analyse market changes and make interpretive choices based on the data;
- adopting creative and innovative thinking to enable new products and services to meet changing customer needs; and
- developing strong relationships and social contacts to enable a better understanding of a market.

Consequently, careers and HR practitioners need to consider that many firms will adopt a version of dynamic capabilities to enable their ability to continually adapt, and to also recognise that firms will feel that key to this strategy is in attracting and developing the 'Microfoundation people-skills' to enable them to achieve longer-term success. Accordingly, the impact of dynamic capabilities for career teams is to consider how they can create career delivery to meet VUCA and skills delivery for changeable and unstable career structures.

## Career Dynamism

To adopt to dynamic capabilities, a firm would need workers with aptitudes and attributes of managing well with change and instability - to enable growth (Wall, Cordery & Clegg, 2002). Recent research showed those best at managing change have demonstrated the skills of resilience, self-reliance and 'career self-management' needed to meet the changing world of work that

is fluid in nature (Bimrose et al., 2011). People who demonstrate they can manage uncertainty are more likely to manage in the new world of work as expected in a firm adopting dynamic capabilities that are both VUCA and dynamic. As such the 'Career Dynamism' approach advocated by Pasha (2019) 'bridges' the two theoretical constructs of 'worker career' development and 'organisational strategy' development and so offers a 'dual empathy' approach.

Central to 'career dynamism' is the belief that to manage change and uncertainty, workers need adaptive and pro-active career qualities and these same qualities are desirable for dynamic capability corporate success (Zhou & Li, 2010). The study by Pasha (2019) revealed four highly significant career dynamism qualities: (1) *Analytical Skills*; possessing the personality traits of (2) *Openness to Experience*; (3) *Conscientiousness*, and the *Career Resilience* trait of (4) *Self Reliance*. These attributes are similar to the Microfoundations people-skills that are key to dynamic capabilities success and to the qualities described in dynamic capability with employability (Finch et al., 2016). These factors also align to those described by proponents of career adaptability, such as pro-active career management skills. For example, there is clear alignment of the career adaptability factor of 'curiosity' as it is also a sub-trait of 'Openness to Experience' (Bimrose et al. 2011)

Dynamic capabilities skills are needed by workers in firms to achieve sustainable development, as outlined by Harreld et al.:

Dynamic capabilities [at IBM] are not abstract academic concepts but a concrete set of mechanisms that help managers address the fundamental question of strategy, which is to develop a truly sustainable competitive advantage. Interestingly, we are beginning to realize that sustainability is fleeting unless it is aligned with capabilities to continually sense how the marketplace is changing and seize these changes through dynamic organizational realignment.

Harreld et al. (2007, p. 41).

As such, the rationale of career dynamism mirrors the dynamic capabilities that Harreld et al. (2007) highlight in their paper that described how IBM achieved success

from near failure in the 1990s. In implementing a change-orientated organisational dynamic capability strategy, IBM was able gain a competitive advantage by focussing on building people qualities needed for evolution and change. This approach has been repeated in numerous studies and strategies across the world. A crucial learning point is that these people-capabilities are qualities needed not only in a firm by its workers, but potentially all workers to manage a VUCA influenced career. Career dynamism highlights the key people skills that should be adopted in order to more successfully navigate a changing world of work. These skills are also related to recent career literature and especially those outlined by postmodern career theorists such as in the Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) by Bright and Pryor (2005). They, and other postmodern career theorists, advocate that career practitioners should offer career delivery that enables people to develop career management skills for success for a seemingly disordered VUCA career environment – by placing greater emphasis on skills development within career practice – as described within CTC. Indeed, Bright and Pryor (2005) argue that by focussing more on skills and behavioural qualities, and less on learning occupational information (given it is subject to rapid and repeat change), career practitioners are enabling better lifelong employability, which may also include lifelong learning, in order to adapt to newer skills and job requirements.

## Conclusion

*Trying to place an evolving person into the changing work environment is like trying to hit a butterfly with a boomerang.*

Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996, p. 263)

Career theory has developed as a response to the processes and progress of social, economic, geopolitical and industrial changes. Moving from the early 20th century industrial age of career permanence into career transformation in the 21st century, the literature shows there has been a change from traditional career theory to postmodernist contemporary career theory, suggesting that life-long careers have disappeared and volatility in careers is now commonplace. As career development is a process that an individual undertakes throughout their lifetime, career delivery

therefore needs be focussed more on developing career management skills to a changing world of work. Furthermore, the world of work is anticipated to become more uncertain and changeable, and consequently traditional career delivery models may not be an apposite process for contemporary career development, which is expected to be subject to more ambiguous, chaos led and changeable market forces (Hall & Mirvis, 2013; Bright & Pryor, 2005).

However, current practices of careers delivery are often based on traditional career models and are not designed to offer career support for a new generation of workers moving into a world that will be more uncertain and subject to many changes - including future work scenarios predicted with the advancement of technology and organisational changes. The work by Teece et al (1997) in the field of Dynamic Capabilities demonstrates that firms need to adapt to survive. As demonstrated, dynamic capabilities theory is a useful body of literature to draw on for career development practice, as examining the strategy of firms gives an indication of the impact on future employability needs, especially in relation to future of work scenarios (Lo Presti et al., 2018).

As such, the study by Pasha (2019) argues that people practitioners (HR and careers) should move to supporting individuals to acquire adaptive qualities that would increase their prospects of life-long employability. Many firms are now adopting a model of employment of non-permanent workers as one method of being more responsive and agile, and therefore it is possible that a more dynamic careers strategy, such as one with *career dynamism*, will influence recruitment and development. This paper suggests that keeping a focussed 'individual' view and not including 'employer' views restricts career theory evolution. Thus, considering career development qualities as part of organisational strategy ought to be a significant area for future career management research.



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# Revisiting the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability

Lorraine Dacre Pool

It has been thirteen years since the publication of the article that introduced the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability. During this time, there have been many changes in Higher Education and the graduate employment market, which raises the question, is the CareerEDGE model still relevant in 2020? This article looks back at the development of the model and the complementary questionnaire, the Employability Development Profile and evaluates their global impact. It also considers any criticisms and explores some other employability-related concepts for inclusion in a model of graduate employability development.



## Introduction

It has been thirteen years since the article introducing the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability development (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) was published in the journal *Education + Training*. During this time, Higher Education (HE) has experienced rapid change, not least the large increase in student fees in 2012, bringing with it an increasingly consumerist approach to education. One outcome of this is more focussed attention on the student experience, which includes ensuring students have access to development opportunities that help them to increase their chances of success within HE and to prepare them for life beyond university.

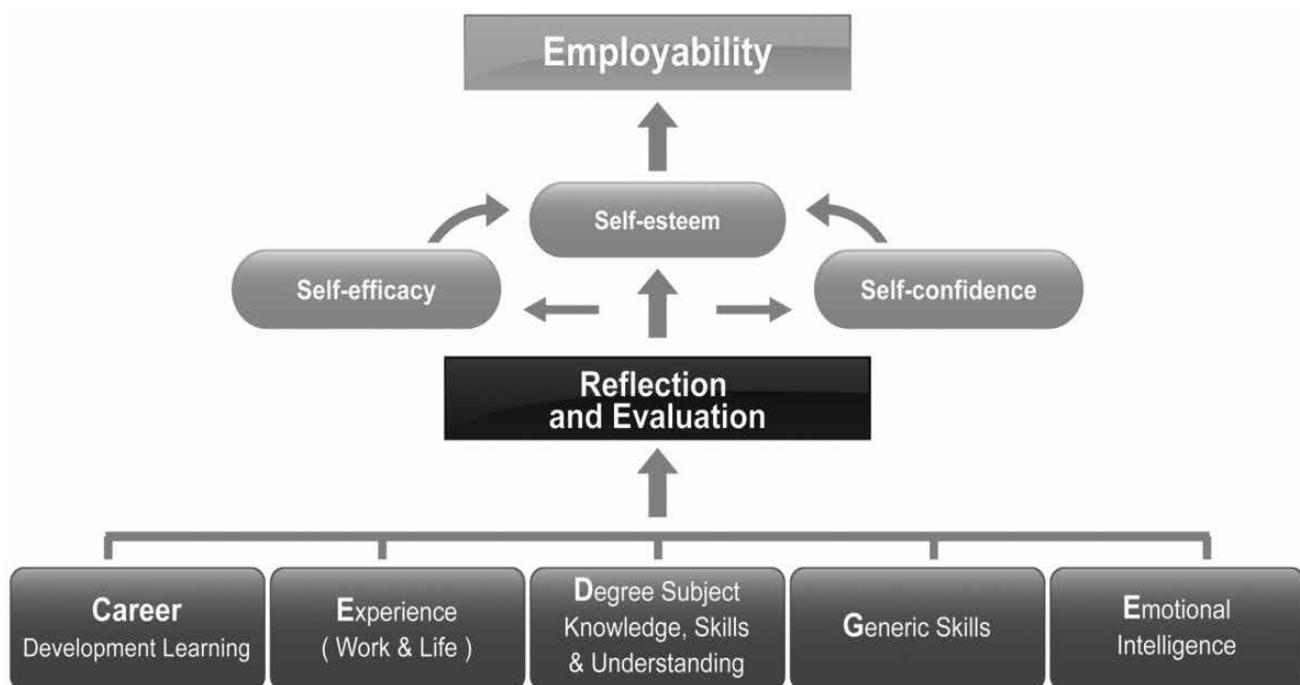
As a psychologist, viewing employability as something the individual can develop and improve, feels positive, empowering and optimistic. The CareerEDGE Model approaches employability from the same perspective as Yorke (2006) who describes it as a multi-faceted

characteristic of the individual. Of course, it is essential to recognise that developing employability does not guarantee a graduate a satisfying occupation. For example, Clarke (2008) draws attention to the fact that ‘...even the most seemingly employable person may experience difficulty finding a suitable job in an unsympathetic labour market.’ (p. 269). However, labour market conditions and other external factors are not something that we as employability developers can influence, but we can try to ensure our students are made aware of them. As De Cuyper et al. (2011) point out, the word ‘employability’ is derived from the words ‘employment’ and ‘ability’. Universities may be able to influence the ‘ability’ element which refers to the person’s skills and competencies but have no control over the ‘employment’ aspects which are dependent on a number of issues, including labour market demand.

With all of this in mind, now seems like an opportune time to revisit CareerEDGE and consider if it still has value and relevance in 2020.

## Development of the CareerEDGE model

The article that introduced CareerEDGE was the result of in-depth, rigorous research into the concept of graduate employability, which had revealed the concept as somewhat woolly and often misunderstood. In particular, from much of the literature on the subject, it was very difficult to distinguish the difference between employability and career management/development learning (CDL). A ‘lightbulb moment’ occurred when it became clear that CDL was just one aspect of employability development and that seeing them as interchangeable concepts

**Figure 1: The CareerEDGE Model of Graduate Employability**

Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007)

was one of the reasons why people were mistakenly viewing employability development as exclusively CVs, applications and other job-getting activities (which are themselves, tools to support just one aspect of CDL). Once this was established, the rest of the essential elements of CareerEDGE became clearer. It is vital that in addition to CDL, students are given opportunities to gain real-world experience, develop their generic skills and their emotional intelligence (EI). At the centre of CareerEDGE is the 'D' for degree subject knowledge, skills and understanding. One of the reasons for the success of the model has been this emphasis on the degree subject being at the centre of the student's experience and, in itself, an essential element of employability development.

## Career Development Learning, Experience (Work & Life) and Generic Skills

Career Development Learning (CDL) is indeed about ensuring students are well prepared for job applications and interviews, but a good deal of important work in this area takes place long before

graduation. Developing self-awareness, which is essential for a successful life beyond university, together with guidance on the wide-range of opportunities open to graduates, are also key to helping students make career decisions that ensure they stand the best chance of securing and retaining occupations they will find satisfying and fulfilling. Additionally, students now need support with presenting themselves in digital spaces such as LinkedIn or other social media and preparing for modern-day selection processes, such as video interviews. CDL activities can also help students to explore important aspects of future careers such as the increasing use of artificial intelligence in the workplace and the importance of living and working in sustainable ways.

Experience, from paid and voluntary work, is also essential. It not only allows students to develop many of the generic skills employers look for in graduate recruits, for example the ability to communicate with different people, work as part of a team and solve problems, but can be another helpful way of learning about what they are looking for and importantly, what they do not enjoy, in an occupation.

## Emotional Intelligence

Before the original publication I was concerned that the inclusion of EI in a model of graduate employability development would be met with some criticism from the academic community but fortunately this did not happen. In fact, quite the opposite occurred with many academic colleagues agreeing that EI is an essential element of employability development. This is supported by the fact that many employers now include EI in job descriptions and person specifications. In 2015, the Chief Assessor and Chief Psychologist with responsibility for recruiting individuals to the Civil Service Fast Stream graduate programme was quoted as saying 'We want people with good interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence...' (Leach, 2015). EI also features as part of the Civil Service Learning curriculum, which demonstrates its acceptance as an important aspect of everyday experience in the workplace. Having asserted that EI was a key aspect of employability development, I needed to be able to demonstrate that it was possible to teach and for students to develop. This work was carried out between 2007 and 2011 and provided evidence to support this assertion, not only demonstrating that EI could be taught but that students can also develop confidence in their EI ability, otherwise known as Emotional Self-Efficacy (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012). Confidence in any ability means there is a greater chance that it will be used. If we needed any further convincing a recent meta-analysis has shown a clear, positive association between EI and academic performance and supports the growing consensus among educators, researchers and policy makers, of its importance for both wellbeing and future workplace success of students (MacCann et al. 2020).

## Cultural Intelligence

One further concept that does warrant explicit inclusion within CareerEDGE is Cultural Intelligence. This concept shares a degree of overlap and interaction with EI, and some researchers now consider it to be a key part of the concept (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2016). Cultural Intelligence is defined as 'an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings' (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009, p3) and is an essential skill in today's diverse workplaces and global society.

## Reflection and Evaluation

At the next level of the model, we have 'Reflection and Evaluation', whereby students should be provided with guidance and opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their employability learning experiences. Reflective logs, diaries, portfolios and journals have become widely accepted assessment activities across the HE sector, with a recognition that it is often guided reflection on learning experiences that allows effective and deep learning to take place (Artess, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017). It is these deep learning experiences that have the potential to bring about increases in Self-Efficacy, Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem (the three Ss), so vital for employability development.

By engaging with all the elements of the model, graduates have a better chance of reaching their full potential and developing their personal resilience. For example, a student may take part in an in-class activity where they are given a group problem-solving task. During the activity they may find themselves naturally assuming a leadership role, encouraging quieter members of the group to contribute, organising the different members with essential tasks and managing the time, resulting in a positive outcome for their group. Time spent reflecting on this activity should allow the student to recognise the different generic skills they were able to develop and demonstrate during the activity. They may also recognise their EI ability, which helped them to see when others may have wanted to contribute but didn't feel able to (reading emotions in others), recognise and regulate their own emotions (they may have felt anxious about completing the task but worked through this with the resultant successful outcome). We can see how taking part in this planned classroom activity and reflecting on it, could lead to this student recognising that they do have potential for a leadership role, should they choose to follow this path in the future.

## Resilience – connected to the three Ss and EI

The subject of resilience is receiving a good deal of attention in HE, with growing concern about students struggling to cope and experiencing mental health

issues. Resilience was not explicitly included in the original CareerEDGE model but is closely related to the three Ss and to EI. For example, a student who takes part in a work-related experience, perhaps a project working to a brief from an employer, will no doubt experience set-backs and challenges along the way. Perhaps they will make a mistake. By reflecting on this experience and being guided to learn from it, they can also see that mistakes are part of life – we learn from them and use the learning in future. It is this type of experience that helps to build self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience and can be recalled to mind when similar challenges are faced in the future. Additionally, developing aspects of EI such as emotion regulation strategies, will also be helpful for building resilience.

## Other related-concepts for consideration

Over the years there have been a number of other suggestions for inclusion in a model of graduate employability development. These include concepts such as positive attitude, integrity, enthusiasm and other aspects of good character. These, among others, can be recognised as important for any student to develop, but unlike other aspects of CareerEDGE, they cannot be taught in the same way we can teach knowledge, skills and abilities. However, as part of CDL activities, we can and should talk to our students about them, explain their importance for future career activities and help them to articulate evidence of them in future job applications and interviews.

## The Employability Development Profile (EDP)

The CareerEDGE Employability Development Profile (EDP) is a brief self-report diagnostic tool that encourages students to consider their employability strengths and plan actions for any improvements. It has been made freely available to the academic community throughout the world and translated by overseas universities into a number of different languages including German, Spanish, Polish, Mandarin and Persian. It is not the answer to everything employability related but can ensure that students recognise early on in their HE experience that

employability is not just about getting a job, which can wait until their final year or until after graduation. They are then in a much better position to take advantage of the many learning opportunities on offer whilst they are studying, which will help them to develop their employability throughout their degree studies. It is recommended that students complete the EDP on an annual basis, allowing them to ‘check-in’ with their employability development and continue to plan their next steps.

The psychometric properties of the EDP have been examined and published (Dacre Pool, Qualter & Sewell, 2014). More recently, changes have been made to the enterprise/entrepreneurship question on the front of the questionnaire. Where there used to be a statement, ‘I would consider starting my own business’ with a ‘Yes/No’ response, following helpful feedback from an expert in this area, this has now been updated to two questions, ‘Are you interested in self-employment?’ and ‘Do you have an idea that might be developed into something of social, cultural or economic value?’ A ‘Yes’ response to either of these questions allows students who may need support with an enterprising idea to be guided towards relevant services.

## Further developments

There is a widespread recognition that providing opportunities for students to develop their employability is an increasingly important aspect of any teaching and learning strategy and CareerEDGE provides a framework for these activities. To support academic colleagues with embedding employability in the curriculum we developed the Course Employability Mapping Tool which allows course teams to audit employability-related activities in their provision, recognise any gaps, and plan actions for improvements. This tool is also freely available to the academic community on request.

## Recognition

The success of CareerEDGE has been somewhat overwhelming, being described as ‘the most comprehensive’ model of graduate employability (Small, Shacklock & Marchant, 2018) and a ‘sustainable employability model’ (Tymon, Harrison & Batistic,

2019). Shortly after publication, the article was selected by Emerald as one of ten noteworthy articles (from approximately 450) included in the 'Monthly Highlights' section of their website and then featured weekly as the most downloaded article in the journal for over a decade. At the time of writing, it has been downloaded almost 60,000 times and cited 1088 times (Google Scholar, accessed 25.2.20). It has appeared in journal articles, book chapters, published reports and is used extensively in Careers/Employability Services and academic departments across the HE sector, in the UK and throughout the world, including Europe, the U.S., Australia, North Africa, the Middle East and Far East.

One example of this is the University of South Carolina in the U.S. where the model was slightly adapted and used to write a chapter for a Year 1 transitions text book. The model was presented to several thousand first year students and their parents during the summer of 2015. At University College Dublin, the model has been used extensively as their chosen employability framework. Careers staff there have mapped their work onto CareerEDGE, illustrating the impact of the entire team.

Using CareerEDGE has allowed staff to appreciate and assimilate the breadth of what makes a student employable. While the importance of effective CV's and performance across graduate recruitment and selection remains critical, we have a focus on enhancing students' skill development, self-efficacy and self-confidence. These, we see, as the building blocks for success in life at University and beyond.

(David Foster, UCD Director of Career Development and Skills, 2016)

## Value and relevance of CareerEDGE

People often say that the reason for its success is that the original article is readable, the model perfectly understandable and straightforward to explain to others and to operationalise. There has been very little criticism of the model. Only some unpublished whisperings that it is too simple! However, I would answer this possible criticism with a question; why does it have to be complicated? Complicated doesn't

necessarily mean good – in fact it can often hide some very muddled thinking... One senior academic recently wrote in a Times Higher Education article that 'The view seems to have taken hold that serious work must be painful to read, and almost impossible to understand' (Tourish, 2019). Personally, I do not see the point of producing work of this nature that only a tiny percentage of the population will read, and an even tinier percentage understand. I would rather be criticised for simplicity but know the work is of interest and use to many.

Since its original publication in 2007, the CareerEDGE model has informed the way careers practitioners and academic staff understand and teach employability development. The elements on the lower part of the model, are still essential for employability development, as is the assertion that reflection is the key to the development of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. In the current economic climate, with the resultant uncertainty and precarity in the labour market, it is more important than ever that our students are as prepared as they can be to face these future challenges and thrive in this rapidly changing world. The CareerEDGE model supports this endeavour and indeed, in a more marketised HE sector, helps us to meet the higher expectations of our students in relation to developing their employability (Money, et al. 2017).

Interest and positive feedback in relation to CareerEDGE over the years from both Careers/Employability professionals and academic colleagues, provides strong evidence for its current relevance and sustainability. Nottingham Trent University were one of the first UK universities to utilise CareerEDGE and it seems pertinent to conclude with the words of their Director of Employability,

As the future of work develops at an even faster pace, we cannot hope to prepare our graduates for jobs which in all likelihood have not yet been invented. However, if our ambition is to equip graduates to be adaptable in a changing world and secure successful and fulfilling futures for themselves, then CareerEDGE is probably more relevant now than it has ever been.

(David Eade, 2019)



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# Expectation and interaction: Student and employer approaches to university careers fairs

Jodie Boyd & Stephen Boyd

This article sets out to explore why those who attend university careers fairs choose to do so; what expectations they have and how these are formed; what motivates attendance; and how do they themselves understand these choices. Furthermore, it aims to determine their interpretation of what happens at these events and the extent to which careers fairs facilitate access to the graduate labour market. This paper concludes that rationales for attending are unique to the individual and expectations are manifold for students and recruiters alike, often based on intricate combinations of agency, structure and capital.



## Introduction

Despite dramatic change in the higher education sector over the last few decades, one particular feature of university life has remained throughout and is still the most prominent manifestation of employer-student interaction on campus, the careers fair. The rise of employability as both a reason for - and a product of - the higher education experience (Burke and Christie, 2018) has compelled universities to consider how best they ensure that students graduate with a set of skills and attributes designed to help secure career success. This has presented universities with both a challenge and an opportunity to make the experience meaningful in relation to enhancing student employability. It is also an opportunity for universities to attempt to differentiate themselves from competitors in the sector as one that produces the more employable graduates.

## The evolution of careers fairs

Careers fairs are a well-established feature of the annual graduate recruitment cycle at most universities in the UK. Institutions hold such events in order to facilitate direct interaction between employers and students. Since the mid-1990s, many employers and careers professionals have been predicting that such fairs would have a diminishing role in the transitional process from university to the graduate labour market, becoming niche or peripheral at best. However, over the last decade or so, these fairs have evolved from being the preserve of larger universities, to becoming a focal point of employer liaison throughout the sector. As Gilworth (2018, p. 44) points out, 'There are more careers fairs than ever; on more campuses than ever, attended by more employers and students than ever.'

There are many features to careers fairs that remain core and easily identifiable. These features allow us to recognise a careers fair from one campus to another as the same or similar activity. They are arguably defining elements e.g. a large social space, a time bounded open access event, etc. common to all. However, even the most casual consideration of these events would suggest a process of continuing evolution. Layout; incentivised access; use of technology; pre-preparation and screening; data capture; interactive stands; sector specific versus generic – these are all developing features and, in many respects, careers fairs have become more experimental and pioneering.

## Methodology and research design

According to De Janasz and Forret (2008), a student's willingness or ability to establish a meaningful

## Expectation and interaction: Student and employer approaches...

connection with a potential future employer at an early stage, and then maintain an effective relationship from that point, is a key ingredient of career and professional success. In terms of concentration and scale, the most obvious physical manifestation of this sort of interaction on campus is the university careers fair. Although some prior enquiry has been undertaken (AGCAS, 2016), this has often been focussed primarily on participant feedback and evaluation, rather than in-depth scholarship.

The aim of this study was to explore aspects around the motivation of participants; their expectations and subsequent interpretation of their experiences; and where these fairs sit in the wider context of career decision-making and the transition from university to employment. The appropriate theoretical lens through which to explore these questions was Careership theory (Hodkinson et al. 1996; 1997; 2006; 2008), particularly to consider the inter-relational influences of structure and agency; of field and the role of capital; and also to what extent careers fairs perpetuate, or conversely challenge, inequality. There was also the opportunity to link with some contemporary work around Employability Capital (Peeters, Nelissen, De Cuyper, Forrier, Verbruggen & De Witte, 2019) and the nature and diversity of human and social capital in relation to career decision-making.

By adopting a thematic analysis approach (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017), this research was designed to uncover meaning through the ways in which the participants themselves reflect upon and make sense of the careers fair experience and how these perceptions affected their behaviour and approach. This data was captured through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 students (both pre- and post-event) from two different universities, three employers and three university staff, as well as in-situ observations at two careers fairs (one Russell Group, one University Alliance). As the primary unit of analysis was the individual, it was critical to ensure that the interview sample was as representative of the wider population attending careers fairs as possible, and thus a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students and a range of disciplines. There was also a mix of home and international students and the sample included some first generation students. The employers came from different sectors but were

predominantly from high volume recruiters as they are disproportionately represented at careers fairs. The observations provided contextual data and researcher triangulation. A number of unstructured interviews and conversations with other students and recruiters also took place during this phase of the research.

## Motivations

### Recruitment

The traditional assumption is that students attend careers fairs for the purpose of recruitment. This is often held up by universities themselves in publicity materials and to justify the expense in running such events in the first place; namely, that they facilitate a transactional interface on campus between those who are seeking new talent (employers) and the available talent themselves (students/graduates). Although the data offered up from the various stakeholders did touch upon this fleetingly, it was by no means offered up as a primary reason for participating, or motivational factor in attending; in fact, it was noteworthy for its relative absence in the data. The message from the employers was that they saw their attendance at careers fairs as the start of a process rather than the process in its entirety, a means to an end rather than the end itself. One employer implied that they subsequently 'layer' the careers fair with further recruitment activities designed to reinforce and strengthen the bond between recruiter and potential applicant, akin to Porter Cordon & Barber (2004) and their notion of critical contact.

To hope for much more is just pie in the sky really. We always take a data capture app with us, follow it up with the students afterwards and maybe meet them for a coffee on campus, or do a networking event afterwards, or something, just to kind of try and layer that Careers Fair. As I say, if you just turned up at a Careers Fair and kept your fingers crossed that you'd get an employee out of it, you just wouldn't.

'Sarah' – UK recruiter

Interestingly, none of the students expressed a belief that the careers fair held potential for actual recruitment – in the sense of walking away with a possible job offer – but did express a view that they

had potential to be the first step towards a deeper meaningful connection between student and recruiter.

## Opportunity Awareness

A curiosity to explore options directly motivated some students to attend careers fairs. One participant was keen to use the careers fair as a means of acquiring new insight and information, and he was looking towards the people on the stand to open up new possibilities for him.

I'm just going to go around like talking to everyone and asking them like oh ok, I'm studying psychology, what can I do with this and hopefully it'll be helpful to see that you can also work with different companies with a psychology course.

'Nick' – Psychology Student

Students seemed to expect they would be the ones to initiate conversations, but then felt it was down to the employer to steer the rest of it. However, if the student was unable to reciprocate in terms of meaningful dialogue, it was unlikely to be fruitful. This is significant, not least because this apparent lack of insight might not be an indication of lack of effort, rather an absence of the social and cultural capital to know how these things work or how to get the most out of them. In such circumstances, the careers fair is arguably perpetuating the gulf that exists between those students who know the rules of the game and those who do not.

There is well-trodden educational path from Year 11 onwards, which requires decisions that often serve to give the impression to the student that with each passing year things become more specialist and more niche. It is therefore understandable that often students feel unable or unwilling to consider what is available to them in a wider context, or transferable way, and for many it will appear counter-intuitive that many graduate vacancies in the UK do not require graduates with a specific subject discipline. For many students, the careers fair presents an opportunity to utilise interactions to begin the cognitive process of assembling and assessing options. The careers fair is an important part of a process – the first steps on a career journey that may result in more defined thoughts on career goals.

Within this context, it becomes possible to see Careership at work. In particular, the aspects required for effective career decision-making – exposure to structure (economic and labour market); the tools required to compete (education, skills and attributes); and individual agency (the ability to identify options and make choices) – are all at play and intertwined within the bounded space of the careers fair. The data suggested that careers fairs are indeed a key 'turning point' which can shape an individual's 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson et al. 2006, p. 3) particularly as there can be no better example on campus of a constructed space where 'education and labour markets and the dispositions of the individual' (2006, p. 3) interact with each other so definitively. As this student explains;

I'm hoping it might give me some direction. I've only ever thought about my subject (Art) but never really thought about where I could use it. It could be like in finance or something like that and they might ask for more creative types or creative thinkers within that.

'Emma' – recent Art graduate

## Brand awareness – the 'Peacock' factor

What clearly emerged from the data, was the significance employers placed on careers fairs as an opportunity to raise their profile on campus. There was a high level of candour from each of the employers interviewed that this formed one of the primary reasons for attending careers fairs. Two even used the same phrase: 'It's brand building rather than a recruiting piece' (Elena – regional recruiter) and 'I think from an employer's perspective, its brand building' (Katie – UK recruiter).

With this in mind, the careers fair can work on a number of levels. Firstly, as an opportunity to be seen as an attractive option for future career success; and secondly, as an opportunity to promote the company as a commercial proposition, given that most will represent service or product-based entities. This indicated a level of understanding and awareness from the employers taking part that they were using the careers fair space as a means of establishing a position not only in relation to fair attendees, but also

## Expectation and interaction: Student and employer approaches...

in relation to each other. This was a recurring theme throughout, with one employer explaining:

It's a sales piece ultimately. We have all these fantastic stands advertising how big we are and how great we are, and we're all jostling to be seen. We want to show XXXX as a top graduate recruiter ... and if we weren't there what would that look like?

'Sarah' – UK recruiter

Whether the motivation to stand out is a direct reflection of this, as a microcosm of wider sector rivalry and interplay, or simply to be noticed in such a crowded space, will vary, but it does at least explain the vast quantities of resource allocated to develop the presentation and functionality of stands/displays. Another aspect of this relates to that fact that well attended large-scale careers fairs offer many companies a great opportunity to gain unparalleled exposure to one of the most sought after demographics in UK segmentation populations. Careers fairs are too good an opportunity for many companies to fail to seize the chance to promote their wares to significant numbers of potential future 'customers'.

None of the students interviewed prior to attending the careers fair, expressed any awareness of the fact that they might be regarded in this way. Perhaps they were oblivious to this dynamic, or it could be that they held a certain assumption that, as officially sanctioned and facilitated university events, they would be protected from the seemingly ulterior motives of some exhibitors. However, arguably it is because this generation of young people have been the target of incessant multi-faceted marketing since a very young age that it no longer registers as a thing. In other words, it would be more noteworthy from their perspective, if careers fairs were not seized upon as an opportunity by companies to promote themselves more generally.

## Interaction and Reflection

The look, feel, accessibility and interactivity of the careers fair space was a significant emerging theme

from the data and one that engendered opinion from all interviewees, and observed during fieldwork. Correlating these two made it possible to start to group these behaviours based on some common features displayed. In most cases, students tended to align more closely with one of these types, in terms of how they interacted with the space, however these characteristics were evidently combined by some and are not mutually exclusive of each other.

### 'Conformists'

These are essentially space conformists i.e. their interaction is a clear vindication of the organiser's decision-making in terms of space and layout. This group is typified by a willingness to adhere to the intended flow of the space – working through in a pre-determined linear fashion. When questioned as to why, responses tended to focus on the fact that others were doing the same – peer pressure to conform – but also that the careers fair experience was one of hopeful discovery and therefore suggesting that any deviation from this linear path may result in missing something. This approach fits with the expectations offered up by previous student participants (prior to attending) that the careers fair is an opportunity to raise awareness about career pathways and be exposed to possible ideas and options. As such, there is a heightened sense of risk in missing out, should the space not be 'done' in its entirety. They also offer up the notion that the careers fair is something that one should aim to complete, like a task to be accomplished. This may simply be a case of the careers fair activity being regarded in the same light as many other activities at university, such as a module or a project; but it could also illuminate a perspective some students have towards how they view progress towards a career decision. Namely, a series of tasks – such as a placement, a careers interview, CV consultation – that, if approached in the same diligent way a student might approach curriculum-based activity, has an accumulative impact on career choice and securing a first graduate position. Perhaps universities need to do more work to explain to students that not every undertaking or activity offered up on campus is a challenge to overcome, or a task to be completed.

## 'Pre-planners'

The approach of this group to the careers fair space appeared to be more focussed and less susceptible to the distraction of visual stimuli, enticements, and the influence of any preordained desirable layout. It was noticeable that these students tended to use fair maps to accelerate through whole swathes of the space, rather than indulge the social conformities of committing to the linear flow. They were focussed in the sense that these students had a plan before entering the space, designed to target a particular stand/s. For those attendees who have done their prior research, this would seem an effective use of time and an efficient use of the careers fair space, particularly when sharing that space with potentially hundreds of fellow students. A concern that the busy nature of these events might impede also factored in some participants' decision to target particular companies before entering the melee, as explained by Iqra;

I decided to plan beforehand so I knew which companies to aim for. My sister had said it gets really busy so avoid lunchtime. She found it hard to interact with some of the employers, as she had to wait for ages to speak to them. If I was going to queue then it would be for only the ones I am interested in.

'Iqra' – Logistics & Supply Chain student

The potential reward from the careers fair was too important to enter randomly, hoping for the best so a purposeful approach was required.

## The 'lone wolf' and the 'pack hunters'

A feature evident in the fieldwork was students opted to either move through the careers space as an individual, or do so with friends in small groups. For those who made an active decision to do this alone, it was seen to be part of a wider process to achieve clarity of thought and purpose. For these students, other people – especially friends and classmates – could be a distraction. Conduct in a social space, such as a careers fair, when with others would normally be one of compromise and empathy to the combined and multi-faceted needs of each other. This is not to argue that the careers fair 'lone wolf' displays a greater

selfish disposition than others do; merely a realisation that the need to potentially compromise to group-think would risk being unable to extract maximum potential from the opportunity. Some also highlighted an inner turmoil we might all experience in such circumstances – namely, having to share an experience at an event that, by its very nature, is focussed on developing something as fundamentally personal as a career pathway.

By contrast, as the careers fair was a new social experience for most attendees, many would instinctively seek solace and comfort in numbers. Observations certainly gave the impression that small clusters of students would travel around the fair, not necessarily talking to employers as a homogenous group but often moving along with one or two stopping to speak, whilst the others listened or temporarily disengaged from the group. This was a particular tactic adopted by those students relatively unfamiliar with the rules and the social norms of the space. To a certain extent, these can be acquired from family and friends prior to attending of course, but only if those family and friends have experienced a university careers fair themselves. As a first generation student in particular, it is likely therefore, that behaviours would have to be observed and interaction learned, relatively quickly upon entering the space. What was particularly telling was that – as a collective – these small groups would often demonstrate greater confidence as they moved through the space. As they exited the fair, these 'pack hunters' seemed more content and certainly less timorous about the space that surrounded them.

## Relatability

Many high volume graduate recruiters in the UK are increasingly challenged at a strategic level within their organisations to do more to attract diverse talent. Many of these same employers however have found their recruitment strategies to be actively working against this agenda i.e. sifting applications on the basis of high UCAS tariffs; by over-valuing extra-curricular activities in the selection process; and by continually only targeting the same small select number of universities. This has arguably led to a situation where many recruitment teams find they recruit new

entrants in their own likeness rather than diversifying their workforce.

In this research, students were unequivocal in stating that they felt more favourable to recruiters at careers fairs where they could see themselves reflected back from the stand. These findings were consistent with the work of Milman and Whitney (2014), who asserted that organisations need to assert a proactive approach in influencing the view students acquire of them.

The employer participants also spoke about utilising alumni, recent graduates and placement students who then find themselves back on campus, imparting their recent lived experience of the recruitment process and organisational culture to their peers. An approach welcomed by this student;

I think it's good to have a new graduate on the stand because sometimes I found it a bit scary if maybe an older or more serious looking person was on the stand.

‘Obi’ – Food & Nutrition student

However, the employers' main ambition – and one they conceded had yet to be achieved – was to ensure the composition of the team on the stand was also representative of the diversity of their organisation, or perhaps more accurately, the diversity they aspire to have. As one recruiter (Sarah) put it, ‘have the people on your stand that represent the workforce you want to create.’ The participants in this study were happy to divulge that they made assumptions based on how relatable they found the individuals representing organisations and, likewise, this too was acknowledged as a factor by some of the employers in this study. The significance of this should not be understated. The recruiters at careers fairs have a pivotal role to play in not only how that company is perceived on the day, but also as it creates the foundation of the relationship that any potential recruit may have going forward. These recruiters still have to be good at the job of recruiting, but they also represent so much more than that whilst at the careers fair. As articulated by Silkes, Adler and Phillips (2010), ‘Recruiters have such a strong influence on job candidates’ perceptions of a company. Early campus contact with students is a vital time.’ (2010, p. 120).

## Conclusion

There are many different motivations for attending careers fairs and the rationales provided by the attendees in this research were multifaceted and nuanced. The combination of influences, perceptions, and the relative significance attached to these confluent factors, made the decision to attend unique to the individual student. Within this context, expectations are formed and bounded by the individual’s ‘horizon for action’ but the actual experience of the careers fair can result in a recalibration of this.

Careers fairs continue to play a significant role in facilitating the transition from university to graduate employment, but as part of a more involved process rather than providing the actual hiring moment itself. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to make relatively minor changes to the format in order to better support fairer access to these career pathways. Universities need to regard the careers fair as the culmination of a career planning exercise, rather than an isolated event. This way, preparation and expectations can be managed effectively and any anxieties can be mitigated. To consider space and configuration in a way that incentivises natural conversation and interaction, and removes barriers – real and perceived – should facilitate better engagement. University careers services need to work more closely with employers to help them make good decisions about careers fairs. For too long this has revolved around car parking and other logistical arrangements; perhaps there needs to be greater insight offered by the careers service to ensure an employer extracts maximum benefit from such events. Above all else, employers have a responsibility to themselves and the students to consider how best they present themselves at careers fairs; not least, in how relatable those staffing their stands are to those students attending. It is here that universities and recruiters need to seize the initiative and do more with process and practice to unleash the full potential of careers fairs.



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# Book reviews

The importance of work in an age of uncertainty: The eroding work experience in America. D.L. Blustein, New York. Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 264, £22.99 (Hardback), ISBN: 9780190213701

Reviewed by Fiona Christie, Fellow of NICEC and researcher at the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre, Manchester Metropolitan University, f.christie@mmu.ac.uk

The 'Importance of work' is an academic monograph that blends reflections on existing scholarship about work together with reporting on findings from a large, longitudinal research project about working lives in the United States. It is written in an accessible, engaging and personal way so would attract policymakers and practitioners, not just academic readers. Blustein pulls together threads from his life's work of both academic research as well as practice in counselling psychology and career development. It packs a punch in its tone and content.

The book is about work in the United States but has relevance beyond that nation as it raises important points about work across the Global North and OECD countries. There is a strong and impassioned authorial voice throughout. His perspective is an unusual one as his career has included both academic research and teaching alongside a counselling psychology practice; a combination which is not common in the UK where I am based, where there is a clearer divide between research and practice. Anyone who is concerned about the quality of working lives today will benefit from reading this book. If you have fears about the uncertain context of the labour market, you will find this book illuminating and insightful.

The author is David L. Blustein, Professor of Psychology, Department of Counselling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology, Boston

College. He has a long and high quality record of accomplishment, having published over 120 journal articles and book chapters on the psychology of working, career development, work-based transitions, the exploration process, the interface between work and mental health, and the future of work. Specifically, he is the author of *The Psychology of Working: A New Perspective for Career Development, Counselling, and Public Policy* and the editor of the *Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Working*.

However, many NICEC journal readers may not be familiar with his body of work. He occupies a school of thought within psychology from the United States, so that readers, whose interest in career development is grounded in other domains, such as sociology and education, may not have encountered him. Despite my own long career in career development practice and now research, I confess I only recently discovered his work, thanks to an excellent keynote he did at the ICEGS conference in 2018.

The book begins with an ambitious and personal Preface in which the author talks about the bereavement of his brother and how that contributed to his motivation to write the book. His brother was one of the participants drawn upon in the study reported upon. He also introduces us to the Boston College Working project, a longitudinal and qualitative research study, on which the book is based. Blustein states that his 'underlying message' is 'a clarion call for work as a human birthright' and that he wants his research to be 'viewed as part of the solution in creating a more just, inclusive, and dignified working life for all'.

The book is clearly structured around a series of chapters:

1. Being alive: Work as a Central Role in Life
2. Being Able to Survive and Thrive
3. Being with Others
4. Being Part of Something Bigger than Ourselves
5. Being Motivated and Being the Best We Can Be
6. Being Able to Care

7. Being Able to Work Without Oppression and Harassment
8. Being Without Work
9. Being Able to Work With Dignity and Opportunity

Each chapter begins with an overview of foundational literature about the topic, it goes on to present and analyse data from the Boston College Working Project and concludes with reflecting on new ideas and research that can helpfully illuminate the challenges and reflections presented by participants in the chapter. Blustein and his co-authors' work on the psychology of working theory is an important frame for the book and threads into different chapters and is recognisable in his exposition of different themes, e.g., around survival vs self-determination, the importance of social connectivity at work, and the role of social support and work volition.

The book expertly threads older but seminal theoretical ideas (e.g., from Freud, Maslow, Freire, Bowlby) with newer writing. Readers may acquire an extended reading list as he describes the work of Duffy and Dik on career calling, Sharone on unemployment, Richardson on the gendering of care work, and Neville on colour-blind racial ideology. Many of the newer work he mentions may not be familiar to NICEC journal readers and will give you avenues to pursue and puzzle out. Writers that NICEC readers may be more familiar with such as Watts, Law, Hooley, Bimrose, or even philosophers within Education such as Bourdieu and Foucault do not appear to any great extent in Blustein's writing which made me pause and reflect upon the multiple groupings of scholars that write about work and careers. Bodies of work in this field risk addressing similar topics, while operating in separate spheres. This has been a long-standing issue in the crowded field of career development, in which there are a number of siloes.

In both early and later chapters, Blustein positions his work in a global public policy context referring to the ILOs' Decent Work agenda and supporting arguments for better public policy to act as a safety net for citizens. In policy terms, he favours a universal basic income, and policies that give greater protection against discrimination at work and recognition for caring work. Conceptually he makes a strong argument against contemporary individualist ideas which lead

people to blame themselves or blame the system if they cannot secure work.

The presentation of data from participants is clearly and evocatively done and makes a refreshing change from much psychological writing that tends to be more quantitative and positivist, presenting tables, charts and hypotheses rather than the words of real people from interviews.

This is an excellent book, and I am not aware of anything similar. Blustein's emphasis is on the eroding experience of work. He manages to do this while maintaining the dignity of his participants and argues for individual, community, national and global actions that can improve work.

We are living in a world where for some, work is a source of pride, accomplishment, connection and creativity. For many others, regrettably, work is a source of enduring anguish and anxiety, particularly given the reality that there does not seem to be enough decent work within the United States and across the globe, for all of those who need work to sustain themselves.

A number of questions struck me as I read the book. Not all, but many of his participants were from an older generation. I suspect that if his participants were all younger, his findings may have been slightly different. However, it is also quite probable that older workers face some of the biggest challenges in the work-place today, which he chronicles expertly.

In my view, one area that other countries may have a different analysis to, is around social class. I was struck that in places, he collapses poverty and being working class together. Certainly, in the UK, discussions of inequality around social class are not just about poverty. Scholars on this side of the Atlantic have done excellent work in considering issues of social class and how aspects of 'habitus' influence expectations and confidence, even for working class people who are not poor.

In conclusion, I would wholeheartedly recommend Blustein's book to those who may or may not be familiar with his work, and praise his commitment in illuminating the difficulties that many people experience in their working lives.

# Call for papers

## Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling: October 2020 Issue

The focus of the journal will be the work of Early Career Researchers and ECADOC Alumni

Editors: Anouk Albien, Bo Klindt Poulsen, Sanna Toiviainen, Miika Kekki and Tristram Hooley

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The deadline for expressions of interest was 15th March 2020.

In this NICEC issue, articles will be from early career researchers such as those currently undertaking doctoral study and those who have recently completed their doctorates. The editors for this issue have all been involved in the European Doctoral Programme in Career Guidance and Counselling (ECADOC) and particularly welcomed submissions from other scholars, from all countries, who have participated in that programme.

ECADOC specialises in career guidance and counselling (CGC) research and brings together highly promising doctoral candidates from European higher education institutions, and supports them to become the spearhead of CGC-related research in Europe and across the world.

Papers published will be on any subject related to career development and from those working in all kinds of research traditions (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods and conceptual).

Please contact Dr. Anouk Jasmine Albien via [anouk-jasmine.albien@psy.unibe.ch](mailto:anouk-jasmine.albien@psy.unibe.ch) if you have questions.

# Forthcoming events | NICEC

NICEC events will be rescheduled based on public health announcements. Alternatively, events will be delivered virtually if possible.

Date & Time	Event	Place
Tuesday 21 April 2020 9.30am-4pm	<i>Free CPD Event for NICEC and CDI Members:</i> <b>NICEC/CDI – At the Cutting Edge: Research into Practice</b>  The implications of digital transformation for careers work - what does the future hold, what are the opportunities, and are we ready for it?	Sheffield
<b>Network meetings and Seminars:</b>		
Wednesday 13 May 2020 2-5pm	<i>Network meeting</i> <b>Decent Work and Career Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is Decent Work and why should it matter for Career Guidance? - Fiona Christie (Manchester Metropolitan University)</li> <li>• Working for Nothing? Student and graduate experience of unpaid work - Eileen Cunningham (University of Salford)</li> <li>• Trade unions and career services: Potential partners for promoting social justice at work - Pete Robertson (Edinburgh Napier University)</li> <li>• Young delivery workers in Greater Manchester – a research study - Christina Purcell (Manchester Metropolitan University)</li> </ul>	Manchester Metropolitan University Business School Room 3.01 (South Atrium)
Thursday 2 July 2020 5-6.30pm	<i>Seminar</i> <b>A Bill Law Retrospective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-ordinated by David Andrews</li> </ul>	Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, Euston, London (Room 8)
Thursday 24 September 2020 2-5pm	<i>Network meeting</i> <b>T levels and Vocational Pathways</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emma Pollard, Becci Newton and Joy Williams, IES</li> </ul>	Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, Euston, London (Room 5 & 6)
Monday 16 November 2020 5-6.30pm	<i>Seminar</i> <b>Careers Work in Organisations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rosemary McLean, Wendy Hirsch</li> <li>• Employer input planned</li> </ul>	Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, Euston, London (Room 9)
<b>Event Costs:</b>		
<b>Seminars and Network Meetings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members.</li> <li>• £20 for seminars and £40 for network meetings for non-members.</li> </ul>		

# Forthcoming events | CDI

Please note these dates are currently subject to change at short notice, on the advice of the government and Public Health England. Visit <https://www.thecdi.net/Skills-Training-Events> for the most current information.

Dates	Place	Event
Wednesday 8 April 2020	1 day	University of Derby Student Conference (England) – From Student to Registered Career Development Professional
Wednesday 22 April	morning	London Masterclass: Understanding the value of careers guidance and the role of the qualified careers adviser
Wednesday 29 April Wednesday 20 May Wednesday 17 June	morning	Stoke-on-Trent Swindon London Masterclass: What do young people need to know about the labour market?
Wednesday 29 April Wednesday 20 May Wednesday 17 June	afternoon	Stoke-on-Trent Swindon London Providing and promoting careers and labour market information resources in your school/college – Best practice for Gatsby benchmark 2.
Wednesday 6 May and Thursday 25 June	2 days	London Two-day certificate for careers assistants, with optional QCF L4 accreditation.
Wednesday 13th May 2020 and Friday 16th October	2 days	Manchester Two-day certificate for careers assistants, with optional QCF L4 accreditation.
Thursday 7 May Thursday 21 May Friday 29 May	morning morning afternoon	Manchester Gloucester Portsmouth Masterclass: Preparing for Ofsted as a careers leader.
Thursday 7 May Thursday 21 May Friday 29 May	afternoon afternoon morning	Manchester Gloucester Portsmouth Masterclass: Developing a careers policy for your school or college: a half-day workshop for careers leaders.
Thursday 7 May Thursday 18 June	1 day	London Birmingham One-day SEND training – Optimising careers outcomes for young people with SEND
Wednesday 11 June	morning	London Masterclass: Supporting UK refugees into work.
Thursday 9 July - Friday 10 July	2 days	Derby Two-day, National Careers Leaders Conference – Quality, Sustainability and Professional Practice.
Tuesday 15 September	(start date)	London QCF Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and development
CPD Webinars		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All our CPD webinars are free to members – please register your interest for each session so we can send you the joining link. Non-members can also join these sessions by registering and paying online. For more information visit <a href="https://www.thecdi.net/Full-Webinar-Calendar">https://www.thecdi.net/Full-Webinar-Calendar</a></li> <li>Members can also view any webinar in our back catalogue, through our YouTube channel which contains over 100 webinar recordings. This is accessed through the members' area of the CDI website <a href="http://www.thecdi.net">www.thecdi.net</a></li> </ul>		

## ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for the career development sector. We have a growing membership of 4500 individual members and affiliate organisations and speak with one voice for a lively and 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 services for all throughout the UK.

All CDI members subscribe to a Code of Ethics, which is supported by a strong disciplinary process, and subscribe to the principles of CPD.

Importantly the CDI is responsible for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals; the National Occupational Standards (NOS: CD); the first Career Progression Pathway for the sector; UK Career Development Awards; QCD and QCG/D qualifications; the CDI Academy; the Careers Framework and a UK-wide CPD programme.

Below are a few of our major achievements:

- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website [www.thecdi.net](http://www.thecdi.net); social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of CPD, skills training, webinars and conferences based on market analysis and members' training needs;
- A growing media and lobbying presence with the CDI recognised as the expert voice in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;

- The establishment of the UK Career Development Awards – ten sponsored awards including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Leader of the Year* and *Lifetime Achievement Award*;
- Clear focus on professional identity and increasing the professionalism of the sector through our influence, ownership and development of the QCD and QCG/D and the CDI Academy including the new *CDI Certificate in Careers Leadership*.

## ASSURING QUALITY

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 Development (previously the QCG/D) 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 the NICEC/CDI research-focused events which take place twice a year across the UK.

The Journal is made available to all CDI members via our website.



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