

# Developing a professional workforce: Challenges and Opportunities

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# Research Aims

This research aims to better understand the nature of the prospective workforce and enablers and barriers for recent transitioning career development professionals.

## Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of individuals moving into the career development profession?
2. What factors attract individuals into the profession?
3. What skills do individuals consider transferable and relevant to their new career?
4. How satisfied are they with their new career and what are the career progression opportunities?

# Background

Developing the skills, knowledge and abilities to make career choice and decision is one of the most important skill sets we develop.

Weber et al (2018) call for research concerning the people who support careers interventions and to better understand their values, competencies and how they perceive themselves as career professionals.

This research is part of an ongoing project that explores who the new entrants are to the careers field in the UK.



*“Adults spend their lives working in jobs chosen for them by their unthinking sixteen year old selves” (De Botton, 2009)*

# Understanding career change

Haasler and Barabasch (2015) note that mid-career changes may reflect increased self-awareness and personal agency, internal struggles, a need to fully express the inner self and a move against previous restrictions and constraints

Brown et al (2012) suggest movement across roles, professions and sectors, requires individual recognition of transferable skills which provides a significant advantage in changing career

Neary and Hanson (2019) suggest that new practitioners who have migrated into the careers field may have a credible empathy with clients due a shared transition experience



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# Methodology

- A qualitative inductive research study,
  - online self-completed survey
  - 453 responses
- The survey
  - combination of open comments and Likert scale questions focusing on demographic data and exploring respondent views on what attracted them to their profession, the skills and experience they felt were transferable, satisfaction with their new career and future career progression
- The survey was distributed using professional associations and a snowball approach across the UK
- Ten semi structured interviews provided a personally constructed narrative of the career transition experience



- Responses were received from practitioners working in, HE, secondary schools, further education and vocational colleges and with adults
- Data was analysed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics

# Responses within the field

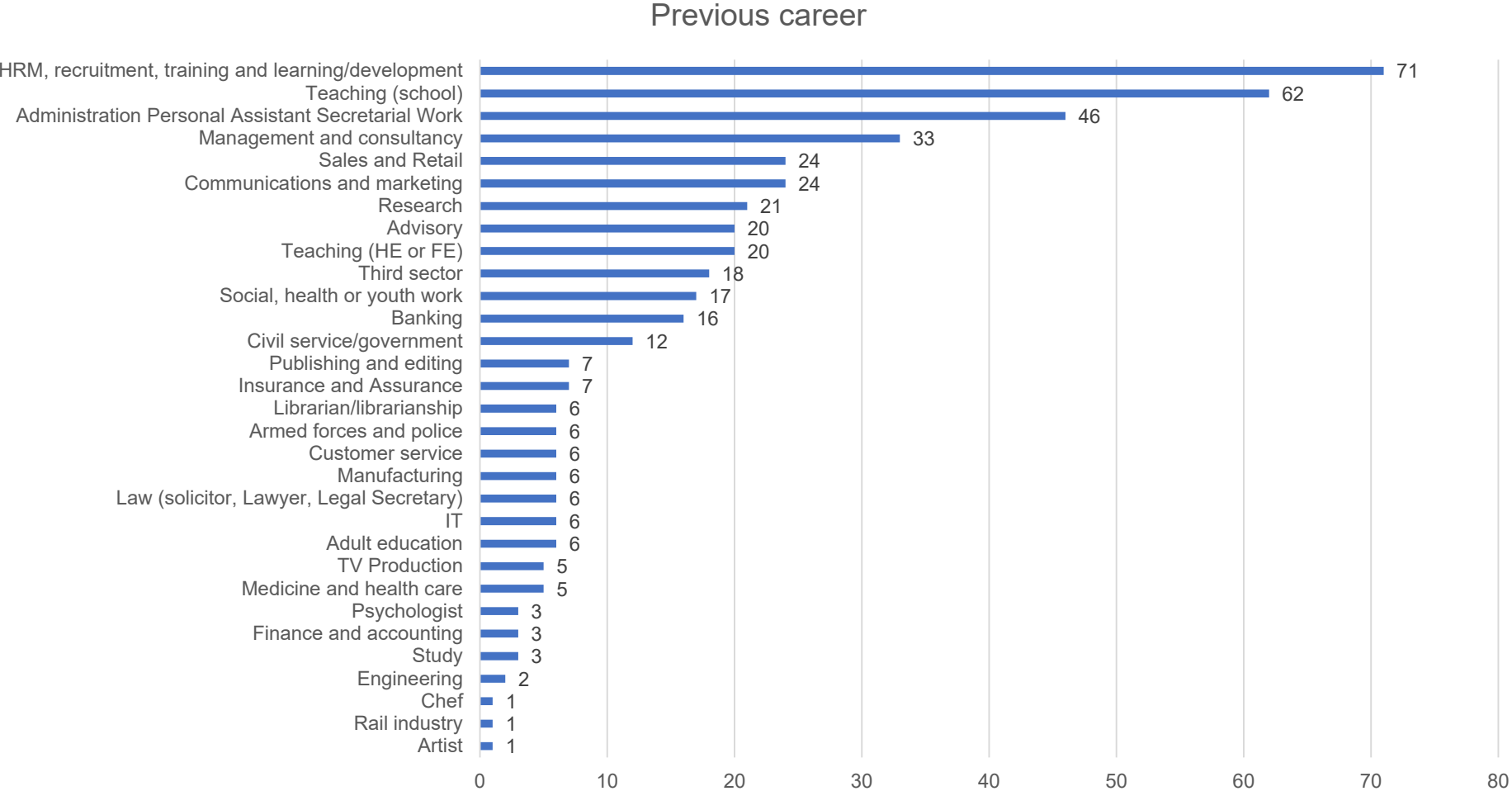
<b>Sector of current role</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Average years in sector</b>
Schools	149	7
Higher Education	143	5
Further Education	36	5
Private Workplace	27	6
Undeclared	22	-
Community	18	4
Self employed	17	8
Adult guidance	13	7
Local government	12	6
Voluntary sector	10	3
Public sector	6	6
Grand Total	453	6

***“A bunch of nice ladies in cardigans who sit students down for a lovely wee chat about their futures”***



**77% of workforce is female**  
**94% defined themselves as ethnically white**  
**65% are aged 45 +**  
**68% are qualified to postgraduate level**  
**89% have a qualification relevant to career guidance/counselling**

# Findings : Previous Occupation





# What did I bring with me?

- Communication and interpersonal skills were the most frequently cited skills
- Listening, empathy, knowledge from previous experience, commercial awareness, labour market information
- Other skills mentioned were research skills, negotiation and teaching.

*‘I feel a little like a GP (Doctor) – you know a little about a lot’*



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*“Knowledge and experience of recruitment processes and best practice for applications from the recruiter's perspective. Knowledge of employment law giving advice around personal and potentially sensitive topics. Ability to train/facilitate group activities”.*

# Why choose this career?

Motivation was strongly informed by their **values** and a commitment to **social justice**, terms such as **'help', 'assist', 'support', 'enable**

Emotive language was used to describe their relationship with the role, **passion, meaningful, helping, being authentic, rewarding.**

Wanting to contribute **to making a difference** for young people in particular was a primary driver for selection of the careers field for a new career.

Practitioners wanted to work with young people/people, **acting as a guide**, providing advice, coaching, educating people and helping them to progress in life

For some it was not such a consciously planned decision but more that an opportunity presented itself and they took it, some referred to this directly as a **'happenstance situation'**

***"Working with people and my own motivation for people to pursue meaningful work and lives that are happy and satisfying"***

***"The opportunity to use professional specialist skills to help young people potentially change their future path".***



# Were my expectations met?

74% felt their expectations had been met...however

Many felt they had in some ways but not others

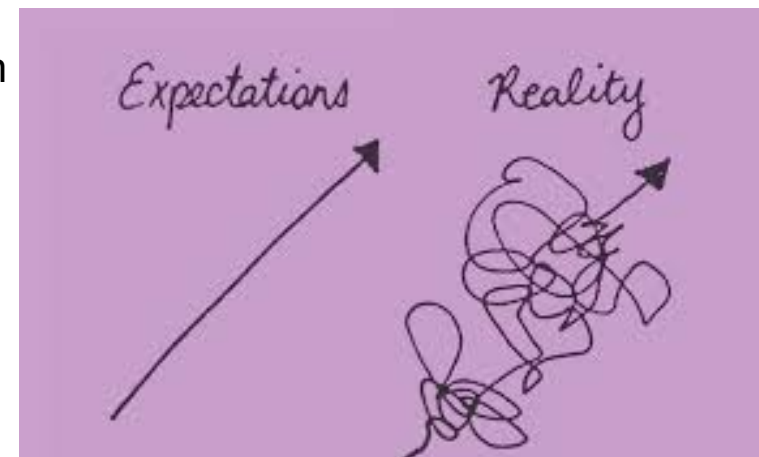
- The role was more complex than expected i.e. writing publications, managing events, marketing etc.
- The amount of administration was considered to be higher than expected

Concerns in some parts of the field about level of professional esteem, progression and salary.

The expectations were often contextual with practitioners working in higher education having different expectations from those working in schools i.e. concerns about salary and progression

Most were attracted to the role by the client focus and were concerned that targets and contract requirements were undermining their role

*“The core role does meet the expectations but the organisation has become obsessed with overly complex recording of interventions, targets and seems to want to measure everything”.*



*“ Yes and no- less face to face student time and more planning and organisation”*

# Protean Career

The protean career (Hall, 1996) adopts the change shaping metaphor of the Greek God Protean and describes individuals as able to repurpose knowledge, skills and abilities within the work environment,

“Protean careerists are flexible, value freedom, believe in continuous learning and seek intrinsic rewards for work” (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009: 1529).

“ The protean person’s own personal career choices and search for self-fulfilment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life”. (Hall, 1976: 201)



# What do employers think?

Employers within the sector feel:

- 67% of employers are struggling to recruit level 6+ qualified career practitioners
- Salary and conditions of employment have identified as an issue e.g. short term contracts, lack of job security, part time contracts
- Lack of progression and promotion are contributing to staff turn over
- Difficult to recruit young people – the sector is seen as being an aging workforce (strength and weakness)
- 62% of employers need to upskills staff technological capabilities

(Neary, 2018)



**“Lack of career progression for staff working on XXX contracts can be a frustration and cause issues of retention. The challenges and pressures associated with payment by results contracts. Job seekers know there are high expectations, tough targets, high volumes of customers to see in comparison with other contracts.”**



# Points for discussion

- The data presents the careers workforce in the UK is attracting highly qualified, highly skilled individuals making a choice to work in the careers field
- The protean career path is exemplified in terms of high values driven and high self direction
- Some practitioners moved through the field to achieve career progression, higher pay and job security– but this was unusual
- Concerns were raised by respondents as to the homogeneity of the workforce, predominantly female, white and aging.



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*“We need to raise the profile of the career sector as it is portrayed as boring middle class white women who want to do good to those who are less fortunate”*

# Points for discussion... Cont

The current workforce does not sufficiently represent the client groups practitioners work with – 80.5% of the population define themselves as white compared to 94% of the group (NAO, 2011)

There is a need to have greater diversity and representation of the population in the workforce

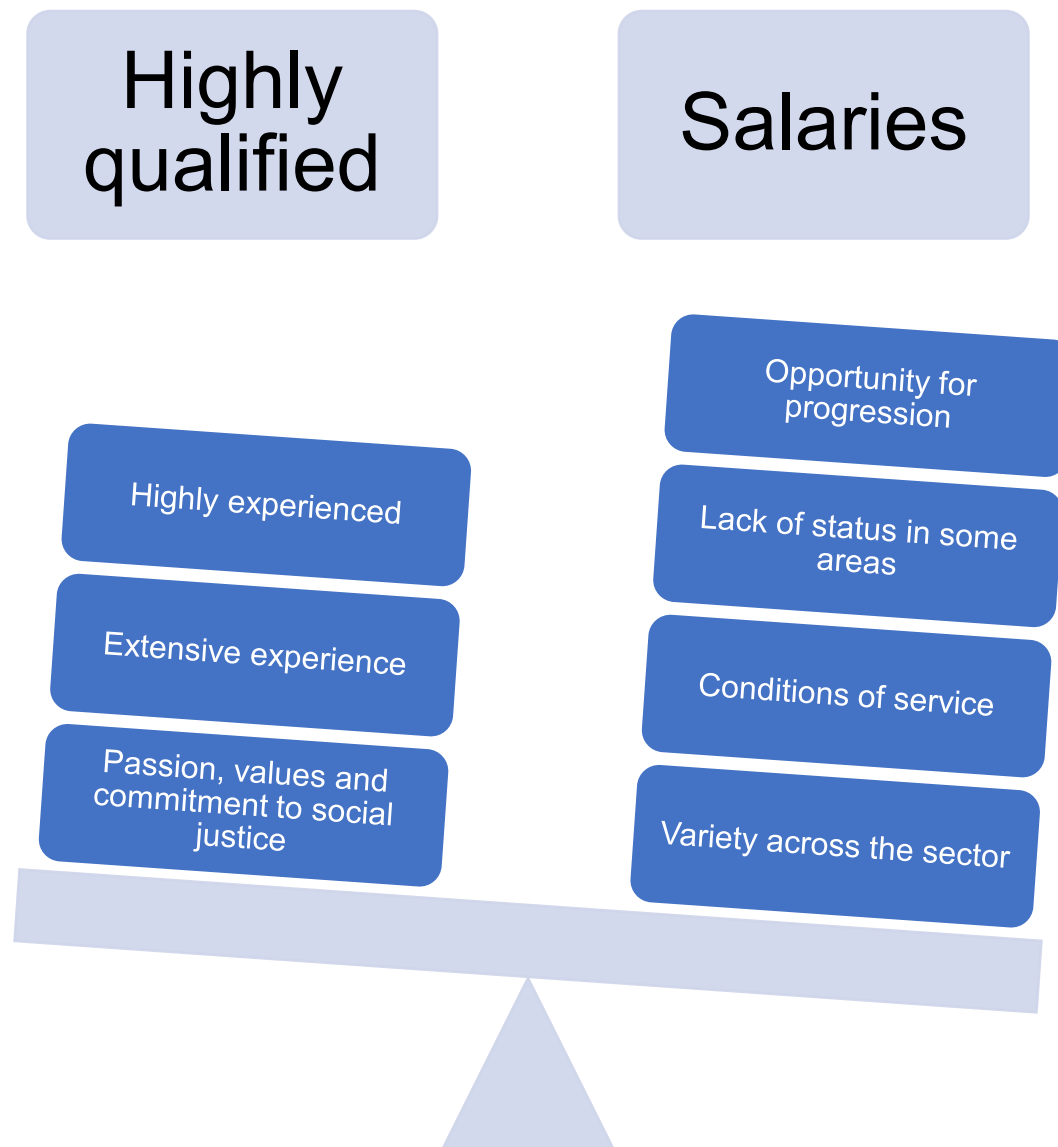
Neary et al (2014) – the majority of salaries in the UK ranged between £15,001- £35,000 (€16,626-38,801)

Low status and salaries – are these perceived as being related to the field as a female dominated profession?



***“There is a real need to recruit a diverse cross section of people, of varying ages into career guidance it is critical”***

# Challenges Vs Opportunities





# Next steps for the research

- Comparative analysis across the various parts of the field to assess variation of views relating to different parts of the sector
- Analysis using protean career path
- Work with the professional associations to recognise the diversity issues and develop strategies to address it.
- The introduction of an apprenticeship in career development in 2019 may provide new access routes



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