No.20 SUMMER 2008

Career Research & Development

the NICEC journal: making practice thoughtful and theory practical

NICEC
National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

Career Research & Development

the journal of the national institute for careers education and counselling

Editor
Anthony Barnes

NICEC
Sheraton House
Castle Park
Cambridge
CB3 0AX
Tel: 01223 460277
Email: anthony.barnes@vtplc.com

Subscriptions
Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal is published three times a year in Spring, Summer and Autumn and the subscription price is £34 within the UK or £55 if overseas (including p&p). The single issue price is £12. Members of CRAC and NICEC receive the Journal, together with a range of other benefits including free attendance at NICEC events.

Orders for Journal subscriptions should be sent to:

NICEC
Sheraton House,
Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX
Tel: 01223 460277
Fax: 01223 311708
Email: sally.fielder@crac.org.uk
Website: www.crac.org.uk/journal

Enquiries about Membership should be addressed to: Louise Atkin, Membership Manager 01223 448 530, louise.atkin@crac.org.uk

Contents

Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal is published by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation.

Guidelines for contributors

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

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

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

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

It sets out to:

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

Editorial

'At a time of rapid economic and social change, we ignore the career development of people in employment at our peril.'

This is the challenging conclusion of Charles Jackson's paper on career development at work. It is one of four papers in this issue of the journal based on presentations by NICEC fellows at the CEDEFOP Guidance for Workforce Development Conference held in Thessaloniki, Greece 25-26 June 2007.

NICEC is committed to encouraging organisations of all sizes to nurture a culture of career development for their staff. Too often, the language of careers is still only heard in a negative context in the workplace, for example, to announce a career counselling package for staff facing redundancy. Career development for staff should apply in normal times and not just in crisis situations.

Support for career development should also be provided for all staff and not just for high-flyers and those on a fast-track to senior managerial and leadership positions. It makes business sense to nurture talent at all levels in an organisation. Recently, for example, the teaching profession and the Civil Service in England have introduced schemes to reward staff who wish to develop their technical expertise rather than have to move into management to get higher rewards. The articles by Charles Jackson, Wendy Hirsh, Ruth Hawthorn and Lesley Haughton presented at the CEDEFOP conference are designed to stimulate fresh thinking about how career guidance professionals can help the wide range of staff in organisations, from HR professionals to Unionlearn representatives, to come up with creative solutions for supporting career development at work.

Some of the resistance to providing career support for people in employment is down to concerns about how to do it, the resources required and the return on investment. It cannot happen without a high level of trust in the culture of the organisation. Nor can it happen in organisations that prefer to recruit 'ready-made' labour rather than being prepared to grow talent from within. Career development should not just be understood in an 'individualistic' sense to refer to the pursuit of personal wellbeing and happiness although it would be perverse of an organisation to espouse the opposite value. Career development is about collective wellbeing too. Engagement, affiliation and participation are key expectations as well as benefits of career. It is the interdependence between one person's work and another's that enables individuals to have careers. Where this interdependence is recognised in an organisation, it is easier to see how self-development and organisational development can go hand in hand.

The issue of career support for people in employment is particularly relevant in England at the present time following the Leitch Review and the current proposals for the development of an advancement and careers service for adults. It seems that just as England is beginning to transform its guidance provision for adults, the provision for young people has become even more confused. In his article, Tony Watts examines what is happening to the partnership model in which young people's career education and guidance is delivered by teaching and teaching support staff employed by a school or college working in harness with the guidance staff employed by Connexions (and before that the Careers Service).

It is difficult to talk any longer of a 'national service' providing career guidance for young people in England unlike the situation which still prevails in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have 150 local authorities implementing local solutions to young people's information, advice and guidance (IAG) needs. Although they are expected to retain the Connexions branding, the national funding for Connexions is no longer ring-fenced and has declined in real terms by 16% since 2002. The 14-19 reforms and Children's Plan initiatives both provide welcome support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) for the enhancement of careers education and IAG; but as Tony Watts concludes, we still lack clarity over the model (or models) that we are moving towards and we will need first-class leadership from local authorities and professionals at the local level to ensure effective provision in the future.

Workforce development of school and college careers education and IAG staff is one of the areas which the DCSF is beginning to address. They are about to commission research on the skills gaps of careers co-ordinators and have asked the Training and Development Agency (TDA) to suggest ways of preparing subject staff to give better information and advice on progression in their subjects.

Finally in this issue, Barbara Bassot reports on an evaluation of the first e-learning course for careers co-ordinators offered by Canterbury Christ Church University. One of the objectives of this pilot which met with mixed success was to reinforce the partnership model by encouraging school staff to study for the certificate alongside their link Connexions personal advisers. The potential of e-learning to overcome the training deficit of staff involved in careers education and IAG has not yet been fully exploited. Staff often find it difficult to get out of school to attend face-to-face courses, but this mode of delivery is ideally suited to 'any time, any place and just for me now' professional development. The Canterbury Christ Church University certificate course does also include some optional face-to-face sessions for those who can get to meetings. As we know, blended learning solutions can be even more effective.

Anthony Barnes
Editor

The Partnership Model for Careers Education and Guidance in Schools and Colleges: Rise, Decline – and Fall?

A.G. Watts

In this article, I outline the rise of the partnership between schools and an external careers service which has underpinned the delivery of careers education and guidance in schools in the UK. I then describe the recent decline of the model in England, under the Connexions Service. Finally, I outline the new arrangements for integrated youth support services, with particular attention to the Children's Plan, and the potential within these arrangements for the model to fall – or perhaps leave scope for future regeneration.

Rise

Since the advent of careers education in schools in the early 1970s (Schools Council, 1972), the dominant model for the delivery of careers education and guidance in schools has been based on a partnership between these institutions and an external service. Schools have provided information libraries, run careers education programmes within the curriculum, provided some ongoing support through the tutor system, and made available information about individual students to the external service. The external service has provided professional career guidance interviews, helped in organising work experience and the like for students, and run staff development programmes for relevant school staff.

In the 1980s, the nature of the partnership came to take more varied forms (Watts, 1986). Morris *et al.* (1995; 1999) identified three ascending levels of collaboration and cross-fertilisation: parallel provision, pyramidal provision, and the guidance community. The guidance community was characterised by close involvement of careers advisers in curriculum planning, review and development; by strong systems for information flow and feedback; by clear identification and appropriate use of the respective skills of teachers and career advisers; and by the guidance interview being viewed as just one element of an ongoing strategy for careers education and guidance. There was evidence that in such schools, students developed greater opportunity awareness, decision-making skills and transition skills.

Government policy in the mid/late-1990s was accordingly based on strengthening the relationships between institutions and the external service. In particular, there was encouragement to form service-level agreements based upon greater interaction, clearer frameworks for working together, and closer monitoring of progress.

The partnership model was formally enshrined in the Education Act 1997. This mandated schools to provide careers education in Years 9-11 (subsequently extended to Years 7-8 too); it also required schools to co-operate with careers advisers, and in particular to provide access for them to interview students on the institution's premises. Such access was particularly designed to ensure that all students had access to impartial guidance from a neutral base.

Internationally, in the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review (OECD, 2004), the partnership model emerged as potentially the strongest model for the delivery of careers education and guidance in schools. It was noted that some countries had school-based guidance systems: these tended to be characterised by lack of strong specialised services, by weak links with the labour market, and by a tendency to place the institutional needs of the school before the needs of the student. Others had externally-based systems: these tended to have a weak relationship with the curriculum. Partnership models potentially combined the benefits of both.

Decline

In recent years, however, the partnership model in England has been significantly weakened. The subsuming of the Careers Service within the Connexions Service, addressed primarily to providing holistic services to young people at risk, resulted in a dilution of its attention to careers matters and in a substantial reduction in the extent of services to other young people. The number of young people receiving even a single careers interview from an external adviser was significantly reduced (Ofsted, 2005). Whereas in the mid-1990s almost all young people were seen at least once by a professional careers adviser, this is now far from the case. Data provided to me by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in January 2008, drawing from the National Client Caseload Information System, indicated that only 40% of young people in England now receive an individual (i.e. one-to-one) interview with a Connexions personal adviser (who might or might not be a professional careers adviser).

The same decline has not occurred elsewhere in the UK. In contrast to the policy of 'horizontal' integration of services for young people pursued in England, the policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has been based on 'vertical' integration, with a specialist careers service remaining in place but now on an all-age basis (Watts, 2006a). Information provided to me in January 2008 indicated the current penetration levels of the service for young people. In Scotland, all school-leavers are at present guaranteed a career guidance consultation with a Careers Scotland adviser. In Wales, Careers Wales is aiming for 90% of young people in 2007/08 to receive a careers interview during Key Stage 4. In Northern Ireland, a 'Getting Connected' assessment tool is being used to determine whether a young person is 'decision-ready', with responses being classified as red, amber or green: the expectation is that 50% of the cohort will fall into the first two categories and will automatically receive a one-to-one interview; those in the green category may also receive this service, but where this is not possible will be involved in group work as a minimum; the percentage receiving an interview in 2006/07 was just over 70%.

A single careers interview is not of course the sole measure of the partnership model in action. There has long been a professional debate about the pros and cons of 'blanket' interviewing. But there is a strong argument for all young people to be seen at least once by a professional careers adviser, not least as a quality-control measure. Young people can find it convenient to claim a career direction, which may be very weakly grounded. Moreover, if access to an independent adviser is one of the assurances of impartiality, as enshrined in the Education Act 1997, then such access would seem a minimum entitlement.

Fall?

The decline in the delivery of the partnership model has been reflected in, and exacerbated by, recent policy statements. The 'end-to-end review' of careers education and guidance in schools and colleges (DfES, 2005) concluded that 'schools are best-placed to bring about improvement in CEG provision'. This conclusion did not emerge from any clear argument or considered rejection of alternatives; indeed, it was undermined by much evidence within the review itself. Alternatives such as strengthening the partnership model were not rejected: they were not even considered. It was clear that this stemmed from preconceived views within DfES itself (Watts, 2006b).

In the subsequent *Youth Matters* Green Paper (HM Government, 2005), and more particularly in the *Next Steps* document which followed it (DfES, 2006), the notion that impartiality of career guidance was assured by access to a careers adviser independent of the school was effectively abandoned. Career guidance was now subsumed within a generic concept of information, advice and guidance (IAG), with emphasis on this being provided by the learning provider 'as an integral part of the learning experience'. There was a recognition that 'young people may still have issues that they would prefer to discuss with someone unconnected to the school or college', but this was weakly framed, implicitly focused on confidentiality rather than impartiality, and left to such young people to seek out. Impartiality was now to be secured in relation to the internal provision through new quality standards and 'progression measures' (DfES, 2006, 6.5-6.6). Both IAG and targeted support for young people at risk are now viewed as part of integrated youth support services, responsibility for the delivery of these services is to rest with local authorities, funding for them is no longer to be ring-fenced, and Connexions is to remain as a brand but not as a service.

This process has been extended further in the *Children's Plan* White Paper, published in late 2007 (DCSF, 2007a). The responsibility for delivery of the plan, and of IAG within it, is seen as resting with local authorities. While there is a recognition that residual responsibility lies with central government, the basis for surveillance is to be not inputs but outcomes. This is strongly reflected in DCSF's recent *Good Practice Guide to Commissioning Connexions*, which encourages local authorities to:

> **'Adopt an outcome focused approach, specifying the outcomes required for young people. This approach generally means having a short specification with relatively few prescriptive requirements, and inviting bidders to respond with their proposals about how the service will be delivered to achieve those outcomes (i.e. the service outputs). This will allow for innovation and creativity from bidders in planning their pattern of services.'**

Such an outcomes-focused approach makes it likely that very different models will develop in different areas. It accordingly potentially risks further erosion of the partnership model, which may remain in place in some areas but not in others. In effect, there is nothing to impede a local authority which wishes to move towards a school-based model of delivery.

This risk is exacerbated by confirmation of the shift in the basis for assuring the impartiality of career guidance provision. No direct reference is made to such impartiality being assured by access to an external careers adviser based outside the institution. Instead, it is now seen as being assured in three ways.

The first is through 14-19 partnerships, which will be expected to take responsibility for inter-institutional agreements for the impartiality of IAG provision. These partnerships are viewed as 'one of the most significant reshapings of the education systems of recent years' (7.11). They are given a key role in relation to IAG provision:

'The partnership will provide the forum in which schools, colleges and other providers can agree how between them, they will ensure that all learners within their institutions… receive impartial advice and guidance, including the opportunity to understand the courses and other provision which is available at other institutions in their area… The 14-19 partnership is convened by the local authority and will include the local authority's provider of Connexions services. Schools and colleges should agree through the partnership how the independent service they provide will be used to supplement what is available within the school – and can be used to inform and support the staff delivering guidance on careers and future learning opportunities' (5.17).

This leaves open the nature of the 'independent service'. In principle, it could be confined to a quality-assurance and support-services role rather than a service-delivery role – as envisaged by three Connexions Chief Executives in a recent NICEC survey (Watts & McGowan, 2007, 23-24).

The Gateway process for the approval of these partnerships, supported by the new quality standards (DCSF, 2007b), is seen as playing an important role in assuring the quality and impartiality of the IAG offered within the 14-19 partnerships and in addressing the deficiencies of current provision:

'The 14-19 consortia that will be delivering Diplomas in 2008 have had to pass through a rigorous process in order to ensure they will deliver high quality, comprehensive and impartial information, advice and guidance. In future, there will be an annual report back from the Diploma Gateway process summarising the progress made in establishing effective provision' (5.18).

It is important in this respect to note that the 14-19 partnerships still have patchy coverage across the country, that they are uneven in quality, that their future is highly dependent on the success of the new Diplomas (which is by no means assured), and that there remain significant tensions between the emphasis on partnership and the persistent policy adherence to league tables based on institutional performance.

Second, impartiality is seen as being secured by the content of careers education programmes:

'To drive up the quality of careers education in schools, the Education and Skills Bill will require schools to provide impartial information and advice on learning and careers options. We will help schools by developing guidance for the new personal, social, health and economic curriculum' (5.20).

Finally, impartiality is seen as being secured by information provision (also mentioned in the Bill), and particularly by area prospectuses:

'Another important source of information for young people about learning opportunities is 14-19 area prospectuses. These allow young people, supported by their parents or a trusted adult, to make informed choices about where and how they would like to undertake their learning' (5.21).

In terms of access to individual guidance, a central position is given to the role of tutors. A key feature of the Children's Plan is 'personal support for every pupil':

'The Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group recommended that all secondary school pupils should have at least one person in school who knows them in the round – a personal tutor – both about their academic progress across all subjects, and their personal development – in the same way that a primary school teacher would for children in his or her class.

'To support our Children's Plan vision, we want every secondary school pupil to have access to a single member of staff to play this role. The personal tutor will be familiar with each pupil's progress across all of their subject areas, agree learning targets across the curriculum, help children make subject choices, support them through transitions between stages of learning, and identify children's barriers to success beyond the classroom. The personal tutor will also have a key role in communicating with parents to report on their child's progress and discuss the support they need at home and at school' (3.74-3.75).

The tutor is also viewed explicitly as having a role in relation to career development:

'They will work with young people to identify their long-term aspirations and guide them on the best choice of subjects at age 14 and 16. As we roll out personal tutors, we will test how they can help young people to find out more about activities available through extended schools and to look to future education, training and careers choices' (5.19).

This emphasis on the role of tutors is somewhat ironic. When Connexions was set up, I pointed out that, for students in schools and colleges, the job description attached by the Social Exclusion Unit's *Bridging the Gap* report to the role of the Personal Tutor – 'to provide a single point of contact for each young person and ensure that someone has an overview of each person's ambitions and needs' (SEU, 1999, 81) – was met more credibly by tutors than by Personal Advisers with caseloads of several

hundred. But because the design of Connexions was based on a report addressing the needs of young people who had dropped out of school or college, virtually no attention was paid to pastoral-care structures within such institutions. Had it been, the model of delivery could have been based on tutors playing broadly similar roles to Personal Advisers for young people who had dropped out, with both groups referring individual young people to professional Careers Advisers where such specialist help was needed. Instead, however, the role of Careers Adviser was subsumed within the role of Personal Adviser, with resulting confusion and loss of professional identity (Watts, 2001).

It is significant to note in this respect that the Children's Plan at no point refers to professional Careers Advisers. Indeed, it does not refer to Personal Advisers either. The relevant statement is very general in nature:

> **'The 21st century school can only fulfil its potential if it can rely on other, often specialist, services for children being there when needed – including health (for example mental health and speech and language therapy), early years and childcare, behaviour, youth, and crime prevention services' (Box 7.1).**

Certainly the report recognises the role of specialists:

> **'These services need to be delivered by skilled and motivated staff, who achieve excellence in their specialism and work to a shared ambition for the success of every child' (7.5).**

> **'… we need to ensure that the children's workforce unites around a common purpose, language and identity, while keeping the strong and distinctive professional ethos of different practitioners in the workforce' (7.37).**

It also, however, states that for the parents, children and young people using services, 'professional boundaries can appear arbitrary and frustrating' (7.1). At times, therefore, it talks about *integration* of services. But at other times, it talks about *co-location* – 'locating services under one roof in the places people visit frequently'– and about inter-professional *collaboration* based on teamwork – 'building capacity to work across professional boundaries' (7.1): both of which acknowledge the continuation of separate specialisms.

This raises, though, the issue of *which* specialisms are to be recognised. The recent NICEC survey of Connexions services (Watts & McGowan, 2007) suggested that, in a careers/Connexions context, professional specialism could in principle be recognised at one or more of at least four ascending levels of specificity:

Generic Youth Support Worker (presumably the goal of a fully integrated youth support service).
Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) (the core professional role within Connexions).
Careers Adviser (the core professional role within the former Careers Service, and sometimes maintained within Connexions under an alias like 'Careers PA' or 'Universal PA').
Careers Adviser with particular expertise in, for example, higher education entry (as 'older leaver specialist' – a common specialist role within the former Careers Service), or in work with young people with special educational needs (SEN) or learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).

The simple reference to 'youth' in the statement from the White Paper quoted above could be read as leaning towards the first of these options. Alternatively, however, it could be read as leaving the door open to any of the others. In principle, it would seem open to each local authority to adopt its own position on these matters.

Conclusion

The partnership model is not yet dead. But it has been seriously eroded, and is now exposed to further erosion and possible termination at local-authority level. Much now depends on local advocacy.

The risk is that England is moving, step by step, towards a school-based career guidance system, without admitting that it is doing so. If this is to be the model for the future, then careful thought is needed to ensure how to make it work, and how to ensure access to professional career guidance within it.

But it is the weaker model. At present it is still possible to revive the partnership model and get it to work, on a reconstructed basis. If the present government will not do this, the hope must be that a critical mass of local authorities will keep sufficient partnership infrastructure in place to leave this as an option for a future incoming government.

References

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007a). *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures.* Cm 7280. London: Stationery Office.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007b). *Quality Standards for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance*. London: DCSF.

Department for Education and Skills (2005). *End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance*. London: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills (2006). *Youth Matters: Next Steps.* London: DfES.

HM Government (2005). *Youth Matters.* Cm 6629. London: Stationery Office.

Morris, M., Lines, A. & Golden, S. (1999). *The Impact of Careers Education and Guidance on Young People in Years 9 and 10: a Follow Up Study.* RD 20. London: Department for Education and Employment.

Morris, M., Simkin, C. & Stoney, S. (1995). *The Role of the Careers Service in Careers Education and Guidance in Schools.* Sheffield: Careers Service Branch Quality Assurance and Development Unit, Employment Department.

Office for Standards in Education (2005). *Developing a Coherent 14-19 Phase of Education and Training.* HMI 2442. London: Ofsted.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap.* Paris: OECD.

Schools Council (1972). *Careers Education in the 1970s.* Working Paper 40. London: Evans/Methuen.

Social Exclusion Unit (1999). *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Training or Employment.* London: Stationery Office.

Watts, A.G. (1986). The Careers Service and schools: a changing relationship. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 14(2),* 168-186.

Watts, A.G. (2001). Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *29(2),* 157-176.

Watts, A.G. (2006a). Devolution and diversification: career guidance in the home countries. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 34(1),* 1-12.

Watts, A.G. (2006b). Disconnecting Connexions. In Reid, H. & Bimrose, J. (eds.): *Constructing the Future: Transforming Career Guidance,* 103-115. Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance.

Watts, A.G. & McGowan, A. (2007). *New Arrangements for Connexions/Careers Services for Young People in England*. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

For correspondence
Professor A.G. Watts, NICEC Fellow

E-mail: tony.watts@zen.co.uk

Career Development at Work: issues affecting the provision of career support for people in employment

Charles Jackson

This paper summarises the main findings from a research study to review the career support provided to people in employment. The research was commissioned by CEDEFOP and carried out by a team from the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC).

The research study (Jackson *et al.*, forthcoming) set out to review the range of career guidance provision that supports workforce development across the 25 EU member states and to identify innovative or 'best practice' provision. The focus is on how career development support is being provided to employed workers.

Our study builds on the series of studies carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the European Training Foundation which are summarised in the three key synthesis reports (OECD, 2004; Sultana 2004; Watts and Fretwell, 2004). However, these studies focused primarily on public-sector guidance provision and the role of governments.

There are two main reasons for paying attention to the career development issues of people in employment: one is for people and businesses to realise their full potential, and the other is to enable people and businesses to manage change more effectively. Ongoing and incremental change in the structure of employment opportunities is one reason why the career development of employed workers is an important issue for the European economy.

It is important to recognise that delivering career development support to people in employment is not only a critical activity for the development of a knowledge economy, but also for the well-being of individuals and society.

In this paper we set out to provide a brief overview of the main findings from our research and present examples of the range of career support initiatives that employers and others are putting in place. We also highlight the key issues that emerge from our analysis of existing provision and identify trends shaping the development of career support. Our main conclusion is that sustained and focused effort is required to address the concern raised in the communiqué from the Third International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy held in Sydney in April 2006 that:

> **'In many developed countries, a major current deficiency is adequate career development support for existing workers."**

The research

The project aimed to review the range of career support provided for employed adults both inside (the main emphasis) and outside the workplace. We were looking to identify innovative and best practice provision and the report includes 38 case studies, some of which are quite detailed accounts of practice by employers, trade unions, the public sector as well as other intermediaries.

Our research also draws on the body of work that has been done in the UK and elsewhere on employer practice in this area. We were particularly concerned to see whether experience gathered by research with employers in the UK (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996; Hirsh and Jackson, 2004; Bysshe, 2006) was replicated elsewhere.

It is obviously very difficult to paint an accurate and detailed picture of what is going on across so many different countries. Nevertheless there are always risks in making generalisations about trends and experience and the usual caveats apply – there are big differences in experience – between countries, between employers and also between individuals. Our aim was to capture the diversity of practice and not to present an exhaustive catalogue of provision. However, Table 1 captures what we feel are the main factors affecting the career support given to employed people by different providers.

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Guidance for Workforce Development Conference, organised by CEDEFOP and held in Thessaloniki, Greece 25-26 June 2007.

Table 1: Factors affecting career development activity

Providers	Target groups	Focus of activity	Sustainability	Other issues
Large employers	Highly skilled 'talent' groups. Rest of workforce (sometimes).	Leadership/career development of talent groups. Development for current job.	Commitment to supporting the wider workforce often variable. Concerns about employability cyclical.	Opportunity to make more use of informal support and ICT-based self-help materials. Rarely involve guidance professionals (except for outplacement).
SMEs	Variable. More likely to focus on key people, areas of skill shortage or where economic development a priority.	Focus likely to vary with need.	Often dependent on external support.	Fear of people leaving can be a factor limiting development activity. Access to SMEs can be difficult.
Trade unions	Many initiatives target the less skilled or focus on those at risk of unemployment. Some target moderate to high skill groups.	Main focus on engaging people in learning. More now focusing on career development.	Availability or continuity of funding can be an issue. Initiatives targeted at the less skilled often supported by EU EQUAL or governments.	Involvement of employers critical for success and increases sustainability. Role for EU/governments in promoting social partnership.
Outplacement/ coaching consultancies	Level of support depends on ability to pay. So provision favours higher skilled.	Job placement. Leadership development/ coaching.	Usually engaged by large employers.	Greater use of ICT and self-help materials may extend range of support.
Self-help/peer support	Favours moderate to high skill groups who are more able to participate in these activities.	Networking and information sharing.	Some initiatives have received start-up funding but continuity a problem. Often depends on goodwill/ energy of participants and key individuals.	Partnership and start-up funding might stimulate development.
Professional bodies/ associations	Mainly focused on professional/high skill groups.	Valuable source of specialised information. Limited range of support. Mainly ICT-based but some printed material. Some establish networks of members to advise others.	Provision of information on entry routes and qualification requirements tends to be sustained. More active advisory services less embedded.	May have a role in certification. Often have CPD requirements. Not always an impartial source of information.

Table 1: Factors affecting career development activity *(continued)*

Providers	Target groups	Focus of activity	Sustainability	Other issues
Recruitment consultancies/ temporary work agencies	Focus on high-skill groups and certain employment sectors.	Significant source of specialist labour market information in some sectors. Information on job application process valuable to new/ re-entrants to the labour market. Temporary work assignments provide opportunity to gain work experience in a new area. Some offer training as well as work placements.	If adds value to candidates and results in better placements.	Use of ICT and self-help materials may extend range of support.
PES	Most focus on less skilled. In some cases employed people excluded from service. Some starting to work with employers, especially SMEs.	Job placement. Formal learning. Increasing use of self-service/ICT.	Strong economic and social case for social inclusion.	Ability to cater for highly skilled groups or to provide specialised labour market information, without partnerships with sectoral agencies, may be questionable. Often have a poor image with employers and employed adults due to current focus on low skilled/unemployed.
Publicly-funded careers services	Have tended to focus on less skilled. Some starting to work with employers, especially SMEs.	Skill review. Formal learning. Increasing use of self-service/ICT.	Funding for services to employed people and for work with employers often uncertain. Some national funding models offer access to long-term support (e.g. employer training levies).	Ability to cater for highly skilled groups or to provide specialised labour market information, without partnerships with sectoral agencies, sometimes questionable.

Main findings

1. The lack of effective career development support for the majority of the employed workforce

There is a paradox – employers focus their effort on what they identify as the 'talent' groups – managers, future leaders, and people with scarce skills (i.e. groups that are in high demand in the labour market). On the other hand, governments and the public sector focus on the unemployed, economically inactive, low skilled and disadvantaged groups. As a result most of us fall in the gap and are not catered for either by employer-based provision or government/public-sector provision.

Our review suggests that there are no clear processes for career development inside many organisations and that what provision there is, is often only focused on key talent groups such as graduates and managers. It is assumed that other employees will get help and advice from their line manager and informally. It is also assumed that normal training and job filling processes give employees the access and information they need about job opportunities. There are some notable exceptions. Nokia is one example described in our report and the Nationwide case study presented below is another. There are also important public sector initiatives, such as Bilan de Competence in France and learndirect in the UK, which have a substantial proportion of employed people among their clients.

A number of our case studies describe public sector initiatives with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Many SMEs are unable or unwilling to fund effective career development support. Our report describes work with SMEs in Austria, Belgium and Sweden. The case studies show how SMEs, and the community in which they are located, benefit from regional and local co-ordination and co-operation in the development and delivery of support designed to meet specific local or sector needs.

2. The increasing role for intermediaries in the provision of career development support

A second key finding from our analysis of trends in career development provision is that both policy makers and career guidance practitioners have often failed to recognise the diverse sources of career development support that are becoming available to people – particularly over the internet. Changing economic circumstances and new technology are changing the ways people look for work – both inside and outside organisations. This has given rise to an increasing range of intermediary organisations offering some form of career guidance alongside their other activities.

For many people a web search is likely to be the starting point of any search for career advice. There is greater use of self-help and peer support with a very diverse set of players including specialist information providers, recruitment websites and professional organisations now all supplying increasing amounts of career information and advice – albeit some is partial and limited.

Peer-to-peer web-based support is also becoming much more significant as Web 2.0 technology and specialist social networking sites become more widely available. The development of virtual community websites, two of which are described in our report, for example, draws on the fact that people already working in a particular field are an excellent source of information. The role of virtual community websites and other forms of informal career support are likely to become more significant.

Trade unions are also becoming more active. Trade union-led work in the UK, Finland, the Czech Republic, Germany and Denmark is discussed in our report. Key lessons from our trade union case studies include: a) their reliance on volunteers for the successful delivery of face-to-face based services; b) the importance of training for these volunteers; and c) the need for co-ordination and support to underpin both the initial development of services and their on-going evolution and maintenance (e.g. to recruit and train future volunteers, provide and update resources).

Trade union activity shows the importance of advice and guidance as a critical activity prior to engaging in learning or development. The perceived credibility and trust that trade union members have in their co-workers providing these services has also been an important factor in their success.

We are also seeing changing recruitment practices partly because labour markets are becoming more complex and specialised. This has been greatly facilitated by the growth of internet-based recruitment. This has meant that the widening diversity of potential sources of career support has also been accompanied by some degree of blurring of the boundaries between recruitment and career support. This includes, for instance, companies and recruitment sites making available self-help career tools on their websites. As a recent report by the UK think-tank, Demos, points out (Gallagher, and O'Leary, 2007) relational recruitment practices based on networking and referral are becoming more important and this has implications for how career support is provided to people in employment.

3. The importance of career management skills

Every year, perhaps as many as one in six people change jobs. Although many will be involuntary (e.g. redundancy, end of short term contracts), many others are voluntary and might involve a move to a better or more interesting job, or a change of career direction. Many people also make major career transitions but stay with their existing employer: for example taking on a new role, perhaps as a result of organisational restructuring.

Giving people the skills to manage these transitions better is critical. Some need support but many others will cope successfully on their own if they have had the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for making effective transitions.

A major rationale for career development is to enable individuals and employers to handle change more effectively. Ongoing change is the one certainty in life as far as employment is concerned.

It is also important to realise that most of us pursue and develop our careers in highly specialised labour markets – either in a locality, a business sector, or a specialised field. As labour markets, themselves, become more complex and specialised, lack of understanding of how a particular labour market operates can in itself be a major barrier to getting a job even for those with the necessary qualifications (Jackson, 1996; Jackson, 2007).

A major role for career and HR professionals is to help people become more self-reliant by embedding opportunities to acquire career management skills within their career interventions. Recognising that much career support comes from informal sources, such as line managers, work colleagues, there is also a need for career and HR professional to recognise their role in building the capacity of informal support so that it will be more effective.

Employer case study of innovative practice

One example of an organisation that set out to provide career development support to all its employees is described by Hirsh and Jackson (2004). It shows how introducing a linked set of initiatives led to significant positive outcomes for the business. It is an important example of the business benefits of providing effective career development support to the whole workforce.
In the late 1990s the Nationwide Building Society identified career development as an area of dissatisfaction for their employees. Employee surveys had indicated that employees were unclear about career opportunities and about the processes they should use to develop their careers.

As a result Nationwide set out to develop an approach of offering career development support to all its employees aligned to a business goal of achieving high levels of employee commitment. It achieved this by providing comprehensive career information and advice based on a philosophy of partnership. There were three main ways that support was provided:

1. Individuals were encouraged to discuss their careers with their line managers using a simple 'Career Planner' framework. These discussions build on, but are separate from, the annual performance review.

2. The company intranet was used to provide access to a range of self-help career planning tools, information on career options and job vacancies. Individuals are able to search for a particular type of job or register their interest in the sort of job that interests them.

3. Individuals can also contact the central Career and Leadership Development Team which offers independent advice via email and the telephone. This team also runs career workshops.

Nationwide has tracked how well it is seen as delivering on its career promise and how this indicator relates to employee satisfaction, commitment and retention. Results from their employee survey indicate that 75% of employees felt they had the opportunity for personal development and growth compared with less than a third in companies against which they benchmark. Lower than average staff turnover for the sector is also estimated to save over £8 million a year and profit chain analysis has shown that career development support impacts on employee engagement and commitment, which in turn leads to customer satisfaction and loyalty and hence sales and business growth.

Trends in career development provision

The main trend across all sectors – that is across both the public sector, employer-led and initiatives by intermediaries – is the move to self-help strategies for career support. It is probably the only way of delivering significant increases in capacity without a very significant increased in resources. The main features of these initiatives are:

1. use of ICT (including call centres and the internet) to provide career advice and guidance
2. greater availability of self-help career exploration packages/programmes
3. web-based job search/information facilities are increasingly available and becoming the norm
4. the growth of on-line recruitment (both inside organisations and externally)
5. tiering of levels of career support by offering different levels of support depending on an initial assessment of an individual's needs
6. the use of specialist social networking sites as sources of information and advice. Although still very new, such sites are likely to have a major impact on where people go when they are looking for advice and information about specialised labour markets

What is apparent from these trends is that much career support is being provided informally and not by career professionals.

At the same time we are also seeing a growth in career coaching (usually for those talent groups and funded by employers). Coaching is primarily designed to focus on skill development and behaviour change to deliver improved performance. Much coaching is aimed to improve the performance and leadership skills of managers and most coaches are brought in from outside an organisation, although some employers are starting to emphasise the coaching role of managers in relation to the employees that work for them and contrast this to other roles that managers have as leaders, managers and mentors.

Challenges in developing more effective career support

Our research suggested that there are some major challenges in developing more effective career support for people in employment.

1. Lack of continuity in support
Lack of continuity in funding or lack of will and support has often led to promising initiatives in this area being discontinued. This has affected initiatives in the public sector as well as initiatives by employers and intermediaries. Many initiatives in the public sector or provided by social partners have only received short-term funding. There is also evidence that initiatives by employers are similarly prone to abrupt changes dictated by economic circumstances or business priorities. This lack of continuity in support is, in our view, a prime cause of the fragility and weakness of many interventions designed to bolster career development. For example, relationships which have been carefully built up over time can easily be shattered by the sudden withdrawal of a service.

2. Language and terminology differences between professional groups
These inhibit collaboration between career guidance professionals mainly working in the public sector and HR professionals working in companies. Both about focus of activity – i.e. who benefits? Is it the individual *or* the individual and the organisation? – and about the independence of support.

'Career guidance' and 'career advice' are usually seen by guidance professionals as both independent and primarily benefiting the individual, even though it may be recognised that there are societal benefits and possibly also benefits for employers from these activities. In contrast, career development at work and talent management in particular, are usually seen as benefiting both the individual and their employer and as being to some extent organisationally driven.

Our research and experience suggests that, in practice, career support by employers is usually seen by employees as impartial (i.e. independent) even though it is being given by someone employed by the organisation.

Real career development has a longer term payoff for individuals and the organisation through such outcomes as better relationships, improved skills, and more confident negotiation about the future. It is a strategy for eliciting commitment to the organisation – going the extra mile to achieve superior performance, as the Nationwide example illustrated.

The issue for organisations and the people they employ is to create effective partnerships. In the literature on stakeholding, effective stakeholder engagement is about creating 'win-win' situations for organisations and their stakeholders (Partridge *et al.*, 2005). Successful partnerships create value for both parties.

Similarly it can be argued that effective employee engagement requires organisations to work in partnership with their employees and that this will result in benefits for both parties – employers and employees. In this context, it is clear that career development activities will only be effective and sustainable if they lead to benefits (that is create value) for both the individual and their employer. Activities that only benefit one party are unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term.

3. Characteristics of internal labour markets
Internal labour markets are often relatively small and people are known. Handling one's familiarity successfully inside an organisation presents challenges and can make openness and candour difficult. On the other hand, it can make it easier to know who to speak to and facilitate informal support through networking.

The quality of personal relationships can be extremely important. Inside organisations, information about job opportunities may be available and/or known about before a post is formally advertised (and posts may also be tailored to a known candidate). There are strong similarities with the situation in small states (see Sultana, 2006).

An important role for career development interventions inside organisations is to empower individuals who do not have effective personal networks. This is especially important in relation to equality of opportunity.

4. Increasingly specialised labour markets
The growing importance of knowledge work means that the labour market is becoming both more complex and more specialised. As we have already pointed out lack of understanding of how the labour market operates can be a major barrier to participation (especially, but not exclusively, for new entrants and job changers). A particular challenge for guidance professionals is to help people acquire the detailed labour market knowledge and career management skills that they require. One question is whether career professionals have the necessary degree of labour market knowledge and expertise themselves to provide effective support to people working in these new and increasingly specialised labour markets.

Learning points – what have we learnt? If we are serious about developing services:

1. Partnership working
We must recognise that not only will there always be diversity in provision. (It is required to meet specialised needs.) but that partnerships work best when parties have clearly defined mutual interests. While the lifelong learning

agenda brings together governments, employers and unions for example, it is often more difficult to involve SMEs (but our report contains some examples of work being done involving SMEs). While it is important to foster a collaborative approach to career support and recognise the benefits from diversity in provision, there will always be some tensions. For example career guidance may lead to employees leaving their present employment and finding better jobs elsewhere and this may put governments, unions and employers at odds with each other.

2. Paying for career support

Individuals rarely pay for career support or if they do it is subsidised. People who most need support are often the least likely to be able to fund it. However, it would be extremely short-sighted to limit their access to support. On the other hand, many employers do pay for career development support. First, they frequently pay for coaching, assessment and development support for individuals from key talent groups (e.g. senior managers, etc). Secondly, they also regularly pay for advice and support on learning and development activities. Thirdly, they usually fund outplacement activity.

In the public sector, some countries have used training levies to fund services. Another option is to give individuals an entitlement to funding through training vouchers or learning accounts. This is seen as one way of moving from a supply-led approach to demand-led one and for governments to stimulate the market.

3. Marketing the benefits of career development support

We underestimate the role of marketing, or promotion, to make people aware of the importance of career development. Several of our case studies found that they had to put considerable effort into marketing their services. It is not self-evident to many people that career development is a good thing and considerable persistence is needed to build up a relationship with both employers and employees. Having convenient access in non-threatening locations may be a key factor for some groups. Essentially this means taking the time and making the effort to understand the concerns of the key stakeholders involved. The importance of marketing in increasing take-up has almost certainly been underestimated, and there may be a key role for government in marketing the advantages of career planning *per se*, to encourage individuals to look for it in the form and location most appropriate to them.

4. Service development

Development of innovative services has often relied on specialist input for activities such as training, development of resources, and the setting of professional standards. A variety of types of organisation have a role to play: professional associations for guidance workers, educational institutions that train them, national and regional organisations of employers or trade unions, sectoral organisations, PES etc. It is clear that a range of expertise is required and that no one profession or organisation has a monopoly on that expertise. We need to recognise the role of these bodies as enabling forces in the development of effective services. Once again collaboration is crucial and this requires funding and support.

The way forward

While some progress has been made in improving access to guidance and the quality of guidance systems, since the EU Council Resolution on Lifelong Guidance in 2004, significant challenges remain. A knowledge-based economy needs to make good use of the skills and potential of its citizens. There is, therefore, a need to strike a balance between targeted initiatives for particular groups and some effective level of career development support for everyone.

1. The need for a strategic framework for coherent provision

Too often career development is thought about as a series of separate initiatives either targeted at particular client groups or to tackle specific problems. Just as the DOTS framework[2] (Law and Watts, 1977) has proved useful in shaping careers education and services designed to assist the vocational preparation of people entering the labour market for the first time, so the building of effective career development support for employed adults requires a clear framework of underlying objectives. One framework is the model suggested by Hirsh *et al*. (1995). They suggest that there are five purposes for such activities which apply equally to the individual and the organisation:

i. **Assessment**: activities to provide the individual and organisation with the opportunity to learn about the individual's strengths, weaknesses, interests, etc.
ii. **Career options**: activities to assist individuals' and their managers' understanding of current and future career and job options.
iii. **Action planning**: planning of specific, concrete, time-based learning activities by individuals and organisations.
iv. **Skill development**: activities to promote or deliver skill development.
iii. **Vacancy filling**: activities designed to manage the internal labour market in line with business needs and organisational culture.

Organisations can use a wide variety of processes to deliver these objectives. However, the methods for designing and structuring most career development activities are well understood (see, for example, Jackson, 1990; Arnold, 1997). The key issue is putting together a coherent set of interventions that address each of the five underlying objectives.

[1] The DOTS framework suggests that there are four broad aims for careers work (Decision learning; Opportunity awareness; Transition learning; Self-awareness). These are also seen as the learning outcomes of careers education and guidance activities.

At present the fragmentation of many existing services leads to gaps in coverage as far as employed people are concerned. The strategic intent of any framework is to achieve coherence in provision. The multiplicity of sources of career development support for people in employment also means that there is a need to make more people aware of the range of sources of career support available, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

2. Sharing costs

More effective career development at work will assist the development of a knowledge economy and benefit individuals, employers and society at large. This is an argument for costs to be shared between individuals, employers and governments. However, as noted above both individuals and SMEs often find it difficult to justify the costs involved and this means that governments (i.e. the community at large) should consider subsidising the provision of career support to some beneficiaries.

3. Guidance professionals need to build bridges and links to other professional groups

Our research has indicated that career development support does not just come from guidance professionals. There is a need for guidance professionals and the professional associations that represent them to build bridges and links to other professional groups that advise employers on strategic HR issues and/or deliver support to individuals and their managers on HR development. There are also new roles for career and HR professionals as the trainers, co-ordinators and supporters of people who give career support on an informal basis.

4. The need for more effective dialogue and communication

The arguments for paying more attention to career development are particularly relevant to the debate about how to develop a knowledge economy. Lack of clarity about the role and contribution of career development support is illustrated by discontinuities in service provision and confusion over language and terminology. This has undoubtedly hampered the development of provision, particularly for employed workers.

In our view the challenge is as much one of communication as one of the form or development of provision. While there is clearly a significant gap in the provision of career development support for people in employment, service development requires agreement by the key stakeholders – governments, employers and social partners – on how best to approach an issue that is so central to the EU's future economic development.

Development of a strategy requires effective dialogue between key stakeholders: governments, employers, social partners and intermediaries. Governments, social partners (employers and trade unions) and CEDEFOP need to identify the levers and policy arguments. In particular, it is important to consider what forceful messages we can give to these key stakeholders who have the power to shape the development of career support for people in employment.

Career development vision

Our vision is of individuals being able to make informed choices about work and lifelong learning. It is about seeing the links between what goes on inside organisations and what goes on outside. There often appears to be a disconnect between what governments do which often focuses on increasing the labour market participation of the unemployed, economically inactive and disadvantaged groups and what goes on inside organisations with a focus on the skill and career development of the current workforce.

A significant challenge for employers and governments is the poor understanding of the business case for career development and the links between the government and business agenda. This is not helped by the significant differences in terminology and language noted above. Nevertheless, this research has found examples of businesses benefiting significantly from having effective career development strategies in place for all their employees.

It is also important to be aware how the labour market is changing, that is to understand the context in which people are working and where future employment growth will be concentrated. Brinkley and Lee (2006) point out that most of the new jobs across the EU15 have come from the expansion of knowledge-based industries. Employment in knowledge-based industries in the EU15 increased by 24% from 1995 to 2005, while employment in the rest of the economy increased by just under 6%. The latest economic forecasts from the European Commission (2006) suggest that, in the EU as a whole, 7 million new jobs will be created over the period 2006-2008.

At a time of rapid economic and social change, we ignore the career development of people in employment at our peril.

References

Arnold, J. (1997). *Managing Careers into the 21st Century*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Brinkley, I. and Lee, N. (2006). *The Knowledge Economy in Europe: a report prepared for the 2007 EU Spring Council*. London: The Work Foundation.

Bysshe, S. (2006). *Delivering Information, Advice and Guidance Services in the Workplace: Research Report*. Coventry: Learning and Skills Council.

European Commission. (2006). *European Economy: Economic Forecasts Autumn 2006*. Brussels: European Commission.

Gallagher, N. and O'Leary, D. (2007). *Recruitment 2020: How recruitment is changing and why it matters*. Demos. www.demos.co.uk/publications/recruitment2020 [Accessed 30.05.08]

Hirsh, W., Jackson, C. and Jackson, C. (1995). *Careers in Organisations: Issues for the Future*. IES Report 287. Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.

Hirsh, W. and Jackson, C. (1996). *Strategies for Career Development: Promise, Practice and Pretence.* IES Report 305. Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.

Hirsh, W. and Jackson, C. (2004). *Managing Careers in Large Organisations.* London: The Work Foundation. www.theworkfoundation.com/products/publications/azpublications/managingcareersinlargeorganisations.aspx [Accessed 30.05.08]

Jackson, C. (1990). *Career Counselling in Organisations*. IMS Report 198. Brighton: Institute for Manpower Studies.

Jackson, C. (1996). Managing and Developing a Boundaryless Career: Lessons from Dance and Drama, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5, 617-628.

Jackson, C. (2007). *Recruiting PhDs: What works?* Cambridge: UK GRAD programme.

Jackson, C., Hawthorn, R., Haughton, L., Henderson, L. and Sadler, J. *Career Development at Work: a Review of Career Guidance to Support People in Employment*. Thessaloniki: Cedefop (forthcoming 2008).

Law, B. and Watts, A. G. (1977). *Schools, Careers and Community.* London: Church Information Office.

OECD. (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*. Paris: OECD.

Partridge K., Jackson C., Wheeler, D. and Zohar, A. (2005). *From Words to Action: The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol 1.* A report for the United Nations Environment Programme. Toronto: Stakeholder Research Associates.

Sultana, R. G. (2004). *Guidance policies in the knowledge society*. Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP.

Sultana, R. G. (2006). *Challenges for Career Guidance in Small States*. Malta: Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research.

Watts, A .G. and Fretwell, D. H. (2004). *Public Policies for Career Development: Case studies and emerging issues for designing career information and guidance systems in developing and transition economies.* Washington DC: World Bank.

For correspondence
Charles Jackson, NICEC Senior Fellow

E-mail: jacksonCRS@aol.com

Career Development in Employing Organisations: practices and challenges from a UK perspective

Wendy Hirsh

This paper considers the nature of career development within employing organisations and its implications for the role of employers in offering career support to employed adults. Although based on research evidence and practical experience from the UK (described for example, in Hirsh and Jackson, 2004), recent research for CEDEFOP indicates that the issues explored here also seem likely to be of relevance to other European countries (Jackson et al., 2008).

We will consider:

- *what* we might mean by career development for adults in employment
- *why* employers should concern themselves with 'careers' and why they have some concerns about supporting career development
- *how* career development takes place in the workplace and what processes support it
- *who* is best placed to provide career support for employees
- some suggested actions and issues for employers and for government.

The nature of careers and career development in employing organisations

When we think about career development in the workplace, we need to remember that the UK has a diverse population of employed adults, especially in terms of their levels and range of skills. The UK also has a very diverse mix of employing organisations, ranging from large global companies and government departments through many medium-sized employers in public, private and voluntary sectors, to a host of small firms. Although this paper is mostly based on experience of working with larger employers, we should not assume that small firms are necessarily less sophisticated in their employment strategies, although their processes for workforce development may be less formalised. The term 'career' in the context of the workplace can be seen most simply as the sequence of work experiences an employee may have over time. Work experiences may involve moving from one job to another, but also the changing nature of work within a single job and the experiences of working on varied projects. Career moves in organisations are very often sideways rather than upwards, and may cross departmental, geographical or functional boundaries.

In this paper we will talk about 'career development' and 'career support' for employees rather than 'career guidance'. This is partly because formal one-to-one 'career guidance' is not often provided in the workplace, and professionals trained as specialists in career guidance are not often employed by large organisations. Human resources (HR) or personnel professionals are usually present in all but the smallest organisations, and often get involved in offering career development support in a variety of ways. However, they would not normally use the term 'career guidance' for such activities. We will also describe a range of activities and processes, facilitated by line management as well as HR, which contribute to career development and career support inside organisations. Formalised in-depth discussion of career issues or career plans – implied by the term 'career guidance' – is only a very small part of the overall picture.

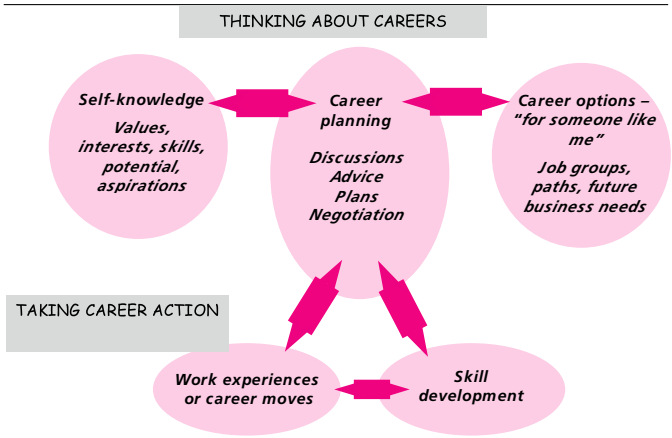
Some elements of 'career development' from the individual's perspective

In order to manage their own careers over time within an employing organisation, and in the labour market more broadly, an individual will usually need to engage with five main areas of thinking and action as shown on Figure 1.

The top part of this model will be very familiar to guidance professionals, with self-knowledge on one side and appreciation of career options on the other. In career planning the individual needs to consider not just their own interests and aspirations, but also what kind of opportunities may be open to *'someone like them'*. These opportunities may be both inside and outside their current organisation. General career information, even inside a particular organisation, is of limited value to individuals without an understanding of how they are seen by the people in their organisation, and for what kinds of jobs they might be considered a credible candidate. So feedback from others is an important input to self-knowledge.

Inside an organisation, career planning is often about using discussions and advice to inform a personal plan or sense of direction. However, further discussions and negotiation are often needed to gain support from others in the organisation who have the power to give access to work or learning opportunities (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).

Figure 1: Career development from the individual's perspective



The bottom of Figure 1 links career planning to taking action, both in terms of accessing work experiences, including making job moves, and accessing formal and more personalised forms of learning. Such action involves navigating a range of formal and informal processes, and gaining support from a range of people. Individuals need career skills to achieve such action, just as much as they do to frame their own career plans or decisions.

All these areas of thinking and action can reasonably be considered to be included within 'career development' for individuals in employment. From the employer's point of view, supporting career development means supporting individuals in all these aspects, not just in thinking about careers but also in taking career action. Employers will only do this if they can see career development as supporting the needs of the business, not just the desires of employees.

Why should employers take positive action to support careers?

There has been much talk of 'making the business case for career guidance' in the UK. In the context of employing organisations, we need to step back a pace or two and reflect on the business case for *careers* and therefore for positive *career development* in relation to employed adults, before we start arguing the case for career *guidance* in the workplace.

'Career' holds out both opportunities and threats to an employing organisation. Among its threatening elements are its focus on the future (which is often difficult to discuss); the possibility of raising employee expectations which the organisation may not be able to satisfy; and the particular fear that discussing career issues may make employees wish to leave their current job or even leave to go to another employer.

On the positive side, career development holds out the possibility of growing critical skills within the organisation, which are often not available on the external labour market; of improved deployment of people in jobs where their talents are well used; of an improved ability to attract good people and possibly retain them; and of improved flexibility in the workforce and therefore the ability to respond to business change. Most interesting perhaps is the link between positive career development and workforce motivation. The evidence for this is steadily growing in the large body of research on the link between HR practices and high performing organisations (for example Purcell et al., 2003). It seems that by attending to employees as people, the nature of the employment relationship shifts to one of higher engagement and higher performance.

'Talent management' is high on the agenda of large organisations and tends to focus on very senior people and those with the potential for such roles. Career development is embraced more enthusiastically here, and individuals in so-called 'talent pools' often receive considerable personal career attention. However this trend can reinforce the assumption that 'ordinary' employees don't really have careers, and that career development is for the few not the many. It is a paradox in the UK, and probably in most developed economies, that only the most advantaged employees receive structured career support at work, and only the most disadvantaged receive structured support from the state. The vast majority of employees fall down a gap between the two.

The business case for career development can, if we are not careful, focus exclusively on the case for investing in training. Training is much more comfortable terrain for employers, but without a career perspective it tends to focus only on equipping people for their current work. Training, and especially raising the level of educational qualifications among less skilled adults, is a major plank of public employment policy in the UK. Public career support hangs somewhat precariously on the coat tails of interventions to get UK adults to study more. We must remember that formal learning, both inside and outside the workplace, may facilitate career development but does not substitute for access to suitable work and to learning experiences on-the-job.

Given this context, career guidance needs have a rather different emphasis when applied to employed adults than when it is a service for young people or the unemployed. It is probably less about vocational choice and access to formal education and far more about navigating the internal labour market and politics of organisational life. The somewhat ambivalent attitudes of employers to career development place more complex demands on workplace career support, and external guidance services need to be very sensitive to the concerns of employers if they are to work with them successfully.

What processes support career development?

We have already said that career development in the workplace involves a wide range of processes and activities. Some of the most important enablers of career development would not generally be seen as career processes at all. For example, job design has a key influence, both on how much development is possible within a job role, and in whether job roles are designed with progression between them in mind. The job filling process is also critical, especially in determining who can apply for vacant jobs or project opportunities; how candidates are short-listed and then selected; and whether managers are willing to let someone try a job they have not done before. Access to training, including self-managed learning and support for gaining qualifications, can be important in opening up career pathways for existing employees to jobs which require particular skills or qualifications. The performance management or appraisal process often generates information which is used in internal selection decisions, and so this also influences careers.

In addition to these 'core' HR processes, many large organisations have more structured processes for supporting the career development of the 'high potential' groups mentioned earlier. Graduate entry schemes, succession planning, talent pools, development programmes at key transitions, personal mentoring and coaching are widely used, but usually only for selected groups of employees.

Careers are also influenced by informal processes though which employees receive advice from others, and those with jobs to fill use their internal networks to gain intelligence on possible applicants. These informal processes are very important and should not be seen in a negative way (Hirsh et al., 2001). Employees may need more encouragement to use informal career support effectively.

So the norm is that most employees are expected to manage their own careers at work, with a bit of help from their line managers and more informal help from anyone else they can find.

So where does 'career guidance' fit in? In theory employees could purchase their own career support from private providers. There are specialist private providers of career support in the UK, often called 'career coaches', but they seem to get most of their work through major employers rather than purchased by individuals for themselves. The private market for outplacement services purchased by employers is well developed. There is also some purchasing of private career coaching for selected other employees, but usually only for very senior or high potential staff. Executive coaching or mentoring may also cover career development issues. Individuals in the UK, however, do not have a tradition of purchasing their own in-depth career guidance (Watts et al., 2005), and neither do most of their employers.

Who is best placed to provide career support for employees?

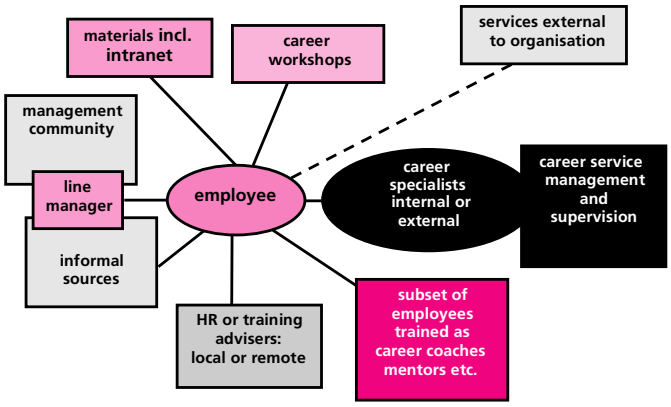
Recognising the lack of career support for the majority of employees, some major employers have been developing more pro-active approaches to supporting career development in the workplace. Hirsh and Jackson (2004) and Yarnall (2008) describe some of these in more detail.

Where employers are using more positive approaches, they can combine more than one of the following:

- Strengthening the support given by line managers by, for example, more collective processes for reviewing and supporting the skill and career development needs of employees.
- One-to-one career discussions or career workshops for groups delivered by HR or training advisers within the business.
- Self-help information on career options, learning opportunities and sometimes career planning tools made available in electronic form, often on the company intranet.
- The use of volunteer 'career coaches', usually a sub-set of HR people and/or line managers, who are given special training and provide career support, often to people they don't know, in addition to their normal work roles.
- As HR Shared Service organisations have grown, career issues may be handled by experts (full-time or volunteer) accessed through the HR service centre, often by telephone.
- A very few organisations pay people to work as specialist career coaches or career consultants with their employees. These people can be employees or external consultants.
- When large numbers of people are made redundant, outplacement companies are often used. So it is a further paradox that the group most likely to be given career support by employers are those being forced to leave.
- Other external services may be used by employees including *learndirect Advice*, a national telephone helpline which can offer limited, but free, career support to all adults and more in-depth support to those with low levels of qualifications. In Scotland and Wales there has been some growth of support to employers from publicly funded careers services, but mostly around training issues and/or dealing with redundancy. For professional employees, their professional bodies may offer career support, usually through informal networking and events, and often provide structured continuing professional development (CPD). Other employees may be able to access support through their trade union.

So there are a range of models for delivering improved career support to employees, some of which are shown on Figure 2. It might be helpful if employers think about using several complementary source of career support to give employees more than one place they can go for help, especially if they find talking to their own manager difficult or if their manager lacks the information or skill to help them. We can think about providing a 'web' of career support – nothing to do with the internet but in the sense of a spider's web – a linked set of interventions within a unified strategy.

Figure 2: Considering a possible 'web' of different sources of career support



All interventions to improve career support for the whole workforce still seem quite vulnerable. For example, some very large UK employers have set up quite ambitious networks of internal, volunteer career coaches, for example, and then later cut the one post required to support and co-ordinate such a network. The case for positive career development for all employees, which we examined earlier, is still not strong enough for most employers to commit resources to enhanced career support in a consistent way. Studies by the professional body for HR in the UK – the CIPD – show that employers still find investing in career development problematic (CIPD, 2003).

So should we advocate the provision of independent (and therefore impartial) career guidance delivered in the workplace by qualified specialists in career coaching, counselling or guidance? There would indeed be some advantages to the use of more specialist career professionals coming in from outside. They may be able to offer more impartial advice, although if from publicly-supported career services they would have national policy objectives and targets to promote. External specialists should be able to work in more depth with individuals in increasing their self-awareness and improving their career skills. However they also have some disadvantages. Most qualified career guidance professionals in the UK are not used to working in employing organisations; employers would be unlikely to fund them; and they lack the specific knowledge of career options and HR processes which others inside the organisation already have. We also need to be mindful that guidance professionals have no monopoly on the 'helping' skills of counselling and coaching. HR managers and line managers are often highly skilled in supporting others and many now undertake formal training in coaching or counselling.

External providers of career services, seeking to sell their services to employers, do not always seem aware of the need to see career support in the workplace as part of the wider system of HR and management processes, not as something separate. External expertise in career guidance may be better used in enhancing the career skills of both managers and employees than in providing a formal 'career service' for all employees inside organisations. Career professionals may also have a potential role working in-depth with individuals who have lost direction or confidence and for whom impartiality and confidentiality of advice may be particularly important.

Implications for employers and public policy

In this paper we have explored a few of the issues concerned with improving career support in the workplace. In summary we would suggest some areas which deserve attention.

Five key areas which **employers** might usefully focus on are:

1. Understanding the *positive business outcomes* of career development, especially in growing scarce skills, deploying existing skills more flexibly, and motivating employees. Employers should develop clearer career strategies and policies for *all* employees, not just those seen as having 'high potential'.
2. Using their *core employment processes,* especially job design, job filling and training, to develop employees over time and not just in their current jobs.
3. Encouraging employees to have informal as well as formal *career discussions* with a range of people who can help them.
4. Connecting several stands of career support – what we might call a '*web' of career support.* This web should include at least one way of accessing career support which is additional to the support provided by the individual's line manager. The organisation should also appoint someone to co-ordinate career development policy and practical support.
5. *Skilling managers* to support careers and *skilling employees* to manage their careers.

Six key *national and public policy challenges*, for consideration by government and other national stakeholder groups are:

1. Providing career support for *employed adults* who are neither seen as 'high potential' (already prioritised by employers) nor low skill (the current priority of government). Who should pay for this career support?
2. Positioning public guidance services to focus on *work as well as learning*, and to widen the learning agenda *beyond qualifications* and formally assessed learning.

3. Delivering on the development of *career skills* in the population at all ages.
4. Clarifying whether public career services should *advise employers on workforce development* and, if so, with what intentions and in whose interests.
5. Clarifying whether public career services should offer career advice in the workplace for *employees* and, if so, how then to deal with the needs and possible concerns of the employer.
6. Consider which providers might be best placed *outside the employing organisation* to give career guidance to employed adults, including those in high skill and specialist labour markets and those working in small firms.

References

CIPD.(2003). *Managing employee careers.* Survey Report. London: CIPD.

Herriot, P. and Pemberton, C. (1995). *New Deals*. Chichester: John Wiley.

Hirsh, W., Jackson, C., Kidd, J. (2001). *Straight Talking: Effective Career Discussions at Work*. Cambridge: NICEC.

Hirsh, W. and Jackson, C. (2004). *Managing Careers in Large Organisations.* London: The Work Foundation.

Jackson, C., Hawthorn, R., Haughton, L. and Sadler, J. (forthcoming 2008). *Career Development at Work: a Review of Career Guidance to Support People in Employment.* Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP.

Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Hutchinson, S., Rayton, B., Swart, J. (2003). *Understanding the people and performance link: unlocking the black box*. London: CIPD.

Watts, A. G., Hughes, D., Wood, M. (2005). *A Market in Career?* Derby: CeGS, University of Derby.
Yarnall, J. (2008). *Strategic Career Management.* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

For correspondence
Wendy Hirsh, Institute for Employment Studies and NICEC

E-mail: wh@ringmer.demon.co.uk

Supporting Learners through Trade Unions

Lesley Haughton

This article examines the role of voluntary trade union activists in delivering information advice and guidance about learning, work and careers to members of their unions. The context for this work is the learning and skills system in England, not for the United Kingdom as a whole. It presents a case study of the way in which we in unionlearn, the learning and skills organisation established by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), have developed a model and strategy for supporting learners in unions. Unions in other European Union (EU) countries may wish to consider how this model could be contextualised in their own industrial relations systems when developing the role of their union representatives and officers in learning and skills.

The political background to the current UK system has been recently described in a unionlearn research paper, which traces the history of union involvement in training 'from the neo-corporatism of the 1960/70s, through the voluntarism of the 1980s/90s, to the present "post-voluntary" era' (Clough, 2007). The paper argues the case for social dialogue around the way in which the costs of raised skill ambitions should be shared between state, employer and individual, for increased collective bargaining over training, secured within a statutory framework and for sustained capacity building for unions to enable them to take this agenda forward.

Trade unions as social partners have a major role in employment policy in the EU, and have signed up to a framework of action for the lifelong development of competencies, which identifies four priority areas for implementation of the framework: the identification and anticipation of competencies and qualification needs; the recognition and validation of competencies and qualifications; information, support and guidance; and resources.

Trade union activity and participation is now considered by organisations in the learning and skills field to be an important feature of workplace learning and also of workplace career guidance in England. Union representatives are helping members to access learning opportunities and to overcome barriers to learning, training, qualifications and progression at work. They can often reach those who cannot, or will not, use conventional services or who do not wish to disclose their learning or training needs to managers or to their employer. These are often people who are the most disadvantaged in the labour market. Learners have reported increased individual confidence and self-esteem after they have started learning again, and increased motivation to overcome the effects of disadvantage. To help them to overcome these barriers, union learning representatives also act as brokers and set up flexible workplace learning opportunities, including the use of technology in learning and career development activities.

The learning and skills agenda is of mutual interest and importance to both trade unions and employers. Unions can work with employers to address their joint priorities of addressing national and regional skill shortages and training needs, and improving productivity. Unions also have a key role in developing a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace. They can assist their members to deal with sectoral and organisational change, and to anticipate redundancy or retirement. They can also help members to develop a concept of career and to develop transferable skills to increase employability or readiness to progress within their current employment.

unionlearn

unionlearn was established by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to provide a strong, high-profile strategic framework and support for unions' work on learning and skills, and the training of union representatives and officers. unionlearn was launched by Gordon Brown at a conference in May 2006. 'unionlearn was established to help unions open more learning opportunities to their members, particularly those disadvantaged in the labour market. Its unique selling point is that it promotes collective action to increase individual learning in the workplace.' (Smith, L, 2007). Although it is mainly funded by government, currently through the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), unionlearn is run by the unions for the unions (approximately sixty unions are currently affiliated to the TUC).

unionlearn currently has two main targets: to increase the number of trained and accredited union learning representatives to 22,000 by 2010 and to ensure that 250,000 learners annually will come into learning through their unions, and supported by union learning representatives, by 2010. Substantial progress has been made towards these targets in the first year of unionlearn's existence. Major themes across our operations include assuring quality, promoting equality, influencing policy and communicating effectively. Over the year, development work has centred on these themes. Innovations have included establishing a quality award for provision, devising tools for information, advice and guidance and planning a knowledge management system to record and disseminate good practice.

The Union Learning Fund

Another catalyst, and the basis for current activity, was the establishment of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) by the government in 1998. Since then, it has involved over 50 unions in projects in 700 workplaces. The ULF currently stands at £15.5 million a year and, since April 2007, has been administered through unionlearn. It supports over 100,000 learners every year, many of them on online courses, Skills for Life (literacy, numeracy and language) and other further education programmes. Other outcomes of union projects have been: the development of workplace learning centres and the opening of many new ones; the development and customisation of courses and training programmes; formal learning agreements signed by employers including agreements about time off for learners; and participation in dissemination or networking events.

The fund aims to build union capacity to sustain work on learning and skills and to make this a core activity for all trade unions, in particular by integrating union learning representatives into workplace union organisation and by demonstrating the clear links between the learning and organising agendas for unions. It also aims to develop the key role of union learning representatives in raising demand for learning, especially amongst workers with low skill levels and those from disadvantaged groups. The ULF is very relevant to this case study because it can be used to help unions to develop a framework to provide high quality information, advice and guidance to stimulate the take up of learning and promote progression. It can also be used to help unions to form active partnerships with employers and make learning agreements to tackle both organisational and individual skill needs and also address wider lifelong learning issues. It encourages unions to form active partnerships with learning providers to ensure that learning opportunities are customised, relevant and delivered appropriately and that appropriate support is provided to learners, and to develop union capacity to engage in other national, local and regional partnerships.

The government expects that projects funded by the ULF will maximise the union contribution to the implementation of the current skills strategy, particularly in securing union involvement in encouraging employers to invest in the learning needs of their staff through signing up to a 'Skills Pledge' which commits them to training all their staff to a specific qualification level. A key part of the pledge is to provide opportunities in literacy, numeracy and language as appropriate.

Unions can bid into the fund via a themed prospectus. Themes for 2008/2009 are: employer engagement; working with sector skills councils; training and supporting union learning representatives; equality and diversity; supporting learners (information, advice and guidance); Skills for Work; continuing progression; and young workers and apprentices. The most important cross-cutting theme in terms of the topic of this article is that of Supporting Learners (Information, Advice and Guidance).

In 2008-09 unions can develop projects which: develop the role and skills of union learning representatives in advising and supporting learners in the workplace; promote the use of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service, and customise and use the 'union learning climbing frame' both of which are described below, and assist learners and union representatives to identify and access progression routes. This may involve supporting specific groups of union members to access learning and career opportunities, including young workers, migrant workers, workers facing redundancy, disabled workers or older workers. Project ideas have been received from a wide range of unions in different sectors.

The unionlearn network model for supporting learners

The idea of accessing learning and progression opportunities and also information, advice and guidance through trade unions is prominent in the learning and skills scene in England. New ideas about the way in which careers services can be delivered to adults via public services are being tested and consulted on by government at the moment. The role of unions, and in particular of the 18,000 learning representatives is perceived as important in the proposed new adult 'advancement and careers service'.

> **'Union Learning Reps are the workplace friends of learning and ambassadors for skills. I would like to congratulate Union Learning Reps and all those learners who have taken that brave first step, gone back into education and made life better for themselves and their families. Only through improving workers' skills can we compete in the global economy and the work that unionlearn and unions are doing to spread the culture of workplace learning is vital.'**
> **Denham, J Rt. Hon, Secretary of State, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, December 2007**

In this context, with development funding from EQUAL, Unionlearn has developed a model and strategy for supporting union learners in the workplace. Part of the support that learners need is to have access to good quality information, advice and guidance about learning, work and careers. The role of the Union Learning Representative (ULR) is central to the model, which builds on active working relationships with providers of information advice and guidance in a network. The model recognises that unionlearn is not, and does not seek to become, a specialist provider of information and advice about learning, work and careers and should work with other agencies which have this role. Unions do provide support for learners through their ULRs, which may include providing information and 'signposting' to others and some may have representatives who are trained and qualified to offer a careers advice service. Practice in unions, and in regions, varies. The 'network model' assumes that unions need to

engage with other agencies in order to find the information they need to help their members and to broker workplace opportunities effectively.

Key publicly-funded organisations in our network model in England currently include: learndirect Careers Advice, providing telephone and online services; nextstep, providing face to face services, and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) who provide labour market information and oversee the development of occupational standards and qualifications in their sectors. We have developed strong relationships with these organisations, formalised by Memoranda of Understanding and joint agreements and action plans at national and regional level.

There are various ways in which careers and information, advice and guidance services can work collaboratively with trade unions. They may make arrangements to market and deliver services together in the workplace or in learning centres. They may make and accept referrals. This activity may have been the result of bidding in partnership for funds to support learners in the workplace or to develop joint approaches to employer engagement. Public services may be able to involve unions in networking or training, invite them to events or conferences or provide access to resources for union learning representatives and union project workers. They may be able to support unions to achieve accreditation against quality standards in order to build the capacity of the union to provide the services their members need themselves. Another important area of shared information is to identify any gaps in the provision of learning and work opportunities and to feed this back to providers of opportunities.

Linking up with unionlearn is a good first step for information advice and guidance providers if they want to work with unions. The regional managers are able to supply contacts and facilitate joint working with unions. Because the role of the union learning representative is voluntary, it is important to check the most appropriate way of contacting them while at work and of working with them. unionlearn can advise on the best way to do this through their unions.

At the heart of the model is the role of the union learning representative.

Union learning representatives (ULRs)

'Fifty unions are now engaged in what I believe is the biggest transformation since the growth of the shop steward movement: a total of 18,000 trades union learning representatives in workplaces all round the country. Today your learning representatives are working in 700 separate workplaces, and they are helping 100,000 of our fellow colleagues at work.'
Gordon Brown, Prime Minister, TUC Congress 2007

In England, there are 200,000 trained union representatives, working in different roles, including the 18,000 ULRs on whom we are focusing in this article. While some ULRs have other union roles, many are new activists and from previously under-represented groups. It is recognised that ULRs can make a significant contribution to promoting and developing workplace learning and the support services that underpin it. ULRs are voluntary union activists with statutory rights which enable them to carry out their role and to attend training courses, set out in the Employment Act of 2002. Recent government reviews acknowledge the role played by trade unions in fulfilling the government's skills strategy, and specifically in motivating and providing support to their members in the workplace.

The role of the ULR is currently attracting considerable attention in the context of the development and delivery of information, advice, guidance and careers services to adults. There are currently more than 18,000 ULRs promoting learning in workplaces in England, many of them supported by project workers engaged in Union Learning Fund projects. It is intended that 22,000 ULRs will be trained and accredited by 2010. The role has encouraged many union members to become activists who have not traditionally come forward, including women and members from black and ethnic minority communities.

Their key functions are set out in the Employment Act 2002 and include: identifying learning or training needs; providing information and advice about learning or training; arranging learning or training; promoting the value of learning or training; consulting the employer about carrying out such activities; and preparation to carry out any of the above activities. Negotiating learning agreements and access to learning and training opportunities with employers is also an essential part of the role of the ULR, and other union representatives may have a role in this. The TUC provides accredited training for this role.

This role has elements which clearly overlap with the role of a professional advice or guidance worker, or that of a tutor or practitioner delivering these as 'embedded' services as part of learning or training provision. The ULR has a role in supporting, coaching and mentoring individual union learners, in identifying the learning needs of members, in providing basic information and advice about learning, with signposting or referral to other provision or specialist services as appropriate. Recent research we have undertaken has shown that learners in unions would prefer to receive front-line support and information from a union representative than from an outside agency (Haughton and Hughes, 2006).

The ULR is therefore in a unique position in that they can provide information, advice or guidance services either formally (when they are qualified and helping learners in a learning centre) or informally (when helping learners in the

workplace setting). They have intimate knowledge and intelligence about the organisations they work for, the industry, the people and the managers. Some ULRs are well placed, due to their length of service and industry/sector knowledge, to provide members with sector specific advice. The majority of ULRs are able, depending on the amount of release time allowed by their employer, to work with learners, providing help and support over a period of time according to the needs of the individual. This is unlike other work-based intermediaries such as *nextstep* who are time bound by the funding available, and can only deliver a service to those who are eligible.

Another great strength of the ULR role is that it is capable of impartiality as the ULR is not usually committed to one specific provider or group of providers either for the purposes of brokerage or signposting. However, the impartiality of ULRs may be affected by the setting in which they are working, the range and scope of information they have access to and the limits of their skills.

Whilst ULRs have a vital role to play in delivering this informal support to learners the vast majority are not professionally qualified information, advice or guidance workers and inevitably some requests for advice and support will be beyond their remit and ability to respond effectively.

The situation in workplace learning centres can be quite different as there may be ULRs who have achieved nationally-recognised qualifications in advice and guidance. In these situations it is expected that members can access a full impartial service through their unions, accredited to the 'Matrix' standard which applies to career guidance services. There is, however, always an underlying tension: although ULRs are in the best position to deliver information advice and guidance and other support to learners, they are volunteers and full-time workers and may easily be overloaded if asked to take on too complex a role. Whilst unions are keen to involve their ULRs in progression training there can be obstacles to overcome regarding release time for further training, usually due to shift working patterns and lack of cover on production lines. There can also be problems of sourcing reasonably priced local provision of nationally-recognised qualifications, and training and assessment programmes do not always recognise the problems that ULRs may encounter in trying to undertake portfolio building in the workplace.

The skills required by ULRs to work effectively to support learners have been defined in recent research done by unionlearn (Haughton and Hughes, 2006), and new accredited training programmes and materials are currently under development by unionlearn. These will be delivered by TUC Education centres or adapted by unions, and offered as options to accompany the five day basic ULR training. While it is recognised that many of the skills developed by ULRs are the same as those required for information and advice work, coaching and particularly mentoring it is intended that ULRs will work closely with other agencies to ensure that union members have access to all the services they require.

Other EU countries have experimented with this role in unions, calling their representatives, for example: learning ambassadors; near-by and learn-trust representatives; personal development consultants; competence pilots and career counsellors' assistants. We at unionlearn regard the role of the ULR to be critical in facilitating workplace learning and skill development.

Resources to support ULRs in their work

The unionlearn website provides access to information and resources which will help careers practitioners to understand the role of trade unions and the ULR and the range of learning and skills activities they are engaged in. In the *Supporting Learners* area of the website, union representatives can find the unionlearn strategy, research and other relevant reports, case studies, downloadable resources including a set of *Guides for Supporting Learners*, and a guide to help unions to achieve the 'Matrix' quality standard which applies to information, advice and guidance services. Regular email alerts keep representatives informed about new resources available on the site.

An important outcome of our EQUAL Supporting Learners project was the launch in June 2007 of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service, in partnership with learndirect Careers Advice, to support both union representatives and union members. Representatives and officers can call a free telephone number to access a range of services tailored to the needs of unions. They can search for courses and make other email enquiries via the portal to the service on the unionlearn website. It provides a 'one-stop shop' which ensures that union representatives can easily find all the information they need without having to build and store their own information bases. They can also check that the information they have is correct and current, and find out about opportunities which they were not aware of. The learning and careers advice service can be accessed in nine languages for migrant workers and others whose first language is not English. A range of leaflets and posters are available from the unionlearn website to display in the workplace and to encourage members to use the helpline for themselves.

Representatives and officers can also gain access via this service to a range of free resources to help them in their work with members. These include a Skills and Interests Inventory, a curriculum vitae (CV) building tool, a Qualifications Calculator, a Career Values tool and guides for working with different groups including ex-offenders, refugees and migrants, older workers and those recovering from mental illness.

As part of the suite of EQUAL development projects we have also developed an online tool called the 'union learning climbing frame'. This is an easy-to-use electronic tool which allows union representatives to create pathways of learning and action plans for individuals which can be reviewed and updated as they progress on their learning journey. It allows ULRs to keep ongoing records of who they are working with and what action has been agreed, and allows unions to generate accurate profiles of their own learners. It also provides up-to-date information for ULRs about a broad range of learning opportunities. It can be customised by unions to fit the needs of members and sectoral priorities. Learners like the climbing frame because it allows them to link recreational, personal and vocational goals and to indicate what type of learning they are interested in. The action planning tool has visual appeal and learners like having a printed plan to take away with them.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is an important concept for the future development of global labour markets. This case study is about what we have been doing at unionlearn to support learning through trade unions, and shows the important role that unions have in delivering services to support members in their learning and career progression.
We have learnt a great deal in the last two years about the excitement and enthusiasm which can be generated for learning through the intervention of union learning representatives, and the changes that learning can make in the lives of working people if they are well supported and are able to select and take up good quality opportunities. We need to continue to build the capacity of unions to support them and to offer representatives training, resources and support to carry out their role in their unions.

It is hoped that there will be 22,000 ULRs active in the workplace in England by 2010, and that they, in partnership with careers practitioners and other specialists, will have a significant role in promoting access to the proposed new adult advancement and careers service. Trade unions, with other social partners in the EU have a key role to play in assisting the workforce to develop and maintain competence in their roles, and the provision of information, support and guidance for individuals is a vital part of this.

References

Clough, B. (2007). *From voluntarism to post-voluntarism: the emerging role of unions in the vocational education and training system.* London: unionlearn Research paper 5, 2007

Haughton, L. and Hughes, S. (2006). *Information, Advice and Guidance: A Mapping Project to Explore the Relationship and Role of ULRs with other Work-based Intermediaries.* London: The TUC Union Academy.

Haughton, L. and Hughes, S. (2007). *The Equal Highroad Project – developing a unionlearn strategy for Supporting Learners (IAG). Report on research and consultation findings.* London: unionlearn.

Jackson, C., Hawthorn, R., Haughton, L., Henderson,L. and Sadler, J.,.(forthcoming 2008). *Career Development at Work: a Review of Career Guidance to Support People in Employment.* Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP.

LSC. (2005). *Working together: nextstep and trade unions.* Coventry: LSC.

unionlearn. (2006). *Making a Real Difference – Union Learning Reps: a survey.* London: unionlearn.

unionlearn. (2007a). *One year on: unionlearn annual report 2007.* London: unionlearn.

unionlearn. (2007b). *Supporting Learners: a summary of the achievements of the Supporting Learners (IAG) project funded by the Equal High Road programme.* London: unionlearn.

unionlearn. (2007c). *Working for learners: a handbook for unions and their union learning reps.* London: unionlearn.

A range of reports, case studies and press releases are available on the unionlearn website www.unionlearn.org.uk.

For correspondence
Lesley Haughton, Supporting Learners Project, TUC unionlearn and NICEC Fellow

E-mail: l.haughton@ntlworld.com

Retraining, Re-Entering, Rethinking: Career Guidance for Older Workers

Ruth Hawthorn

The 2007 study by NICEC for CEDEFOP, Career Development at work – a review of career guidance to support people in employment, reported few examples of provision particularly targeted at employed people over the age of 50, although many services that are expressly for senior management, and many others offering outplacement advice, do see and help people in that age group. Other national and European studies (DfES, 2003 as an example of the former; Clayton et al., 2007 of the latter) suggest there are good services specially dedicated to unemployed older people. But older adults in the context of unemployment are regarded as a group with particular problems. The idea that people over 50 in employment might have rather different, but perfectly normal, needs in making plans about training and career progression, or making changes to have a more fulfilling balance between paid and unpaid work, has not been addressed until recently.

In this paper I explore what is known from existing research on two dimensions of this question of career guidance for older workers, namely what kind of work older people want, and what kind of guidance they would like.

Existing research

I have drawn on UK and European sources, as well as some from further afield, and it may be helpful briefly to describe its scope. In 2002, a UK government-funded project collected qualitative data in England from around 200 individuals and from 63 agencies that provided guidance to older adults, including many that specialised in that target group (DfES, *op. cit.*). This and other data has formed the basis of a series of policy-focused reports from The Age Employment Network, the International Centre for Guidance Studies, the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce and Age Concern (for example, Ford, 2005; Ford, et al., 2007; Grattan, 2006; TAEN, 2007b; Collins, 2006). In the UK there is a renewed policy interest in these issues (for example, HM Government, 2005) and academic research centres in the UK are exploring different aspects of this field (such as the Senior Studies Institute at the University of Strathclyde). The Older and Bolder programme, based at the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, has published a considerable literature on the closely related field of learning in later life which has provided some illuminating concepts (for example, Soulsby, 2004, on the significance of life stage rather than chronological age).

The most detailed research into career guidance policy at a European level derives from the systematic studies of guidance provision in all the member states (within a wider group of countries) carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education (CEDEFOP), the World Bank and the European Training Foundation (the policy lessons of this are presented in OECD, 2004). Sultana (2004), summarising report on the European countries, confirms that the fieldwork, mostly conducted in 2002, showed a real gap in provision for this age group.

More recently a Leonardo da Vinci project on Third Age Guidance involving partners in twelve different member states put together a range of programmes to help older workers, collecting information on different methods of vocational guidance to help different kinds of older people. This has resulted in a good practice guide (Ford and Clayton, 2007) and associated collection of essays (Clayton *et al.*, 2007) on career guidance support for older adults. Other papers from this project are available from its website, www.gla.ac.uk/tag.

Older workers in the labour market: why do we need them?

There are two responses to this question: demography and skills.

The European Commission distinguishes between three kinds of older people: older workers (aged 55-64); the elderly (aged between 65 and 79); and the very elderly (people over 80). The baby boom generation, born just after the Second World War, are now in the older worker category, and entered it just as the supply of younger people in some countries in the Union began to drop as a result of falling birth rates. As that baby boom generation moves into the elderly group, and then become very elderly, taxation revenue from the generation that will then move into the 'older worker' group will be needed to support this changed demographic. This is predicted to happen around 2030 (European Commission Green Paper, 2005). There seems to be some progress towards this goal of encouraging over 50s to stay in work. Although there is

concern about meeting the Lisbon targets more generally, there is some optimism that the employment target for the older worker group, of 50% by 2010, may be achieved. It is rising, and the figure for 2006 was given as 43.6% (European Commission, 2006). The average exit age from the European labour market also seems to have been creeping up slowly to now nearly 61, so any advance on this would help towards Lisbon goals.

One might suppose that increased immigration would offset the falling birth rate and so reduce the need to keep over 50s in the labour market. This possibility is discussed in the 2005 green paper (*op.cit*), but it also points out that the strategic use of immigration for this purpose has other implications for pressure on services and social cohesion and this needs further debate. Nor is it clear the amount of inward migration to Europe as a whole that would offset the need for people over 50 to stay in the labour market for longer. Figures for some individual countries are available, but the pattern varies greatly between countries.

The financial charge on governments resulting from a larger proportion of older people in the population has at least two aspects. These demographic predictions are making some member states decide to raise the age at which you can draw a pension (this is true of the UK – see Ford, 2006), with the double advantage of increasing the period over which individuals contribute to their own, and others' pensions, and decreasing the period over which it will be paid. At an individual level, of course, the state pension age (SPA) is not necessarily the age at which people leave the labour market: many older people who are on minimal state pensions want and need to continue working after the official retirement age. This is also true of people who believed their (private) personal pension schemes would be enough, but when the time comes they find they are not. Both the extended period before the SPA, and the need to work after it, have implications for the career guidance needs of older people.

The rising cost of health care is a key issue. The figures are again confusing: in the UK there has been concern about a rise in numbers of people drawing disability benefit who are over 50, which in the case of men is still a full 15 years before the SPA. This makes it difficult to know the extent to which individuals are in, or feel themselves to have left the labour market (TAEN, 2007). Some at least of these would be able to work and would like to do so but do not know how to go about getting training or work. The government would like to get them back to work and off benefits. Linked to this is the suggestion that work, whether or not it is paid, is actually good for you: the cost of healthcare, and care for the elderly, is reduced if people remain active as long as they can – though not necessarily wage-earning. I will come back to voluntary work.

The skills and knowledge of older workers is also a complex area. On the one hand, it is important to encourage some older people to stay in the labour market because of their skills. But, taking this group as a whole, people with fewer qualifications are disproportionately found among older workers. This compounds their disadvantage in the labour market as they are more likely to be displaced by structural changes in the economy. But it is not easy to judge the extent of this because older workers are less likely to have formal qualifications for the skills that they possess. This has implications for the kind of guidance any individual may need, and should include how to get accreditation for existing skills. The picture is complex and varies between sectors and skill level. In some sectors, at some levels, the skills and knowledge of older workers are real assets. Some businesses are realising this and looking at ways of retaining these skills (TAEN, 2007b). In other sectors or levels the skills of some workers become obsolete, and the challenge for older people who want to stay in the labour market is to acquire new skills, to make job changes or even change sector.

Unfortunately it is often not easy for them to get training: participation rates in skills training in the UK for older workers are lower than for any other group (Owen-Hussey, *et al.*, 2006). This is partly because some employers do not want to invest in older people, partly that some older people themselves lack the confidence or knowledge of what is available to put themselves forward for it. Again, there are implications for guidance here, in relation to the need for advocacy with employers and confidence building for clients.

Barriers to employment for older people

In society at large, and therefore also among many employers, there are a number of beliefs about the capabilities of older people. In the UK there are famously positive employers who purposely recruit older workers and declare this as a strength (B&Q is a chain of hardware stores which does this), and TAEN (2007b) refers to interesting examples from Finland. But that does not reflect the wider reality among most companies. This particularly affects people with lower levels of qualification. Again some sectors are worse affected than others. The problem is made worse by the fact that many older people believe employers will be biased against them even where they are not (DfES, 2003; Ford *et al.,* 2007). This reflexivity is found in other areas. Employers may believe that older people will have or develop a health condition or disability, and some of course do. But this may not be a reason for stopping work. It may be possible to find other work in the same company which uses the person's skills but is less physically demanding. And it is not just employers who need to think more flexibly about this, but the older workers themselves. Also, older workers themselves need to be more assertive about retraining. Where a place cannot be found by the original employer, it may be necessary to change job or change sector. Here, lack of work experience is a real problem for older people as most existing schemes for work trials are targeted at the young. More generally, lack of confidence is widespread among older people seeking employment at all levels.

Caring responsibilities are also a barrier for older people in returning to work. As people move past 50, they are less likely to be responsible for young children of their own, but increasingly more likely to have caring responsibilities for ageing family members or partners, and a significant number are responsible for grandchildren to enable their adult children to go out to work. Some may want to make use of workplace crèches, and others will need to find part-time or flexible work to fit around elder care arrangements. Lack of understanding about this problem and its possible solutions, both by employers and older people, can constitute a barrier.

Lack of advice, or lack of what is seen as being appropriate advice, is another barrier. This emerged strongly from the UK study in 2002 (DfES, 2003) and was confirmed by a more recent smaller study of older people (Collins, 2006). In the past we have tended to distinguish between services for young people, on the one hand, and services for adults on the other, and assume that all adults feel themselves to be in a single group. The Challenging Age data showed that people were much happier with services where they felt the staff truly understood their situation as an older adult, and did not treat them like younger adults. Some even preferred to have older advisers. The New Zealand study too found that this was particularly important to older service users (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2006). This is not to say that other services are not just as good: some of the perceptions about how suitable a service is for older users come from fears and lack of confidence on the part of those users rather than from actual shortcomings. But these fears shape patterns of use, and specific training in working with older people, special marketing and presentation are very important.

Career goals

The challenge in tackling stereotypes about any group disadvantaged in the labour market is to understand and clarify the issues that may affect older people, without strengthening any prejudices by implying that they do. It should be emphasised that no one applies to all people in this age group, and that they need not be a problem anyway if older workers can find the right jobs. Where age management at work is effective, older people can be a particularly reliable and valuable addition to the workplace. This said, there are yet more ways, both social and psychological, in which individuals over 50 vary from each other.

1. Rate of ageing. Some people feel old at 45, some do not feel old at 90. Prejudice about older workers starts as early as 40 in some sectors, and for this reason there is always a debate about research on older workers should draw the line. Many projects have focussed on 45 plus for this reason. 'Stage' is clearly a more realistic way of considering these changes (Soulsby, 2004) but not so easily quantifiable.

2. Values and expectations for life in older age. This also has cultural and individual dimensions. The Icelandic report from the Leonardo study said that in Iceland, 'a busy man is a noble man' (Third Age Guidance project reports, 2007). There they are trying hard to reduce an overall unemployment rate of around 2 % (compared to the European average of nearly 7% – 5.5% in the UK). Where a culture prizes work to this extent, the difficulty for an individual may be to retire rather than to stay in work.

3. Attitudes to voluntary work. Paid work is not the only option, but some societies value voluntary work more than others. Unpaid work contributes greatly to the economy as a whole, if not to domestic income, and fulfils many of the needs that people seek from work. It is also a good way for job seekers to get work experience in a new occupational sector.

4. Gender differences. Kidd (2006) points out that women's careers are more variable than men's and increasingly so: they experience a range of diverse and often discontinuous career patterns. As she says, the female workforce is polarised: childless women and full-time employed mothers working in relatively high-status, well-paid jobs are at one extreme, and mothers in low-status, badly-paid jobs are at the other. Women are more likely than men to interrupt their careers. She agrees with Soulsby (2004) that it would be more helpful to view life course in terms of periods of transition and learning rather than age-related stages of development, which would make it easier to compare their careers with men's. She does not write about age specifically, but among some groups of older women workers, it is possible that women who have taken a career break to care for families may wish to work beyond SPA (which may also apply to men who had been out of the labour market for a while). Women may also be particularly affected by caring responsibilities. Collins (2006) found that the women in her study felt they experienced particular disadvantages, some relating to a lack of understanding by employers of the physical problems associated with the relatively short period during the menopause but contributing to a stereotype.

While we cannot generalise, we can look for patterns of what different groups may want, both in relation to work and in relation to guidance in finding or keeping it. Much of what we know about what older people what comes from studies on *unemployed* older people who want to work again. The New Zealand Government's study acknowledges the occupational and social differences described above, but suggests that a more helpful distinction between individuals may be whether or not work is key, either to their financial well-being or to their emotional well-being. If it is key to both, they will be highly motivated to get back into the labour market, if key to financial but not to emotional wellbeing, then it will be

harder to help them. In the New Zealand context characteristics associated with the more motivated included being male, being at the younger end of the age group (between 45 and 54), and having higher educational qualifications. However, this does not mean that others do not want, or need, to get work. Voluntary work may be seen as very relevant to those in the upper right-hand sector of the diagram above.

Career guidance for older adults

Variations between individuals over 50 indicates that career advice for this group should offer support for any of the following employment goals**:**

i. re-entering the labour market after a short or long break, perhaps, but also perhaps not in the same kind of work, or the same level of activity as in their last job

ii. staying in the labour market, also with possible alternatives:
   - in the same job
   - at the same level, but with a job change
   - going for promotion which might involve more training

iii. strategic reduction of workload:
   - perhaps thinking about winding down towards retirement
   - perhaps wanting to carry on working, but for health or strength or caring reasons needing to reduce it.

Any of these first three goals may require advocacy work with employers.

iv. A complete change. Some need to reduce their work load but cannot do so in their present job or even present sector
   - this may mean retraining, which as shown can be difficult. Also, some employers are reluctant to take on someone changing sector who is older than other staff but less experienced
   - some people want now to follow a dream with a complete job change and do something they have always wanted to do (Arthur, et al., 1999). This may take the form of self-employment, but they will need good sources of advice and support in getting started (TAG, 2007).

What sort of guidance do older people want? The Age Employment Network (www.taen.org.uk) in the UK is developing a ten-point policy manifesto on guidance for older people. As well as the features of good careers advice needed by all age groups, we know from research (DfES, 2003; Ford et al., 2007; Collins, 2006) shows that older adults need:

- advisers trained to be aware of, and sympathetic to the needs of older people, as described above
- an option of face-to-face as well as electronic and telephone guidance. UK research (Hawthorn, in preparation) suggests that while there are many 'silver surfers' are happy to use distant guidance, others are less likely to do so
- time to tell their story
- respect and encouragement to combat diminishing self-esteem and loss of motivation
- the chance to see an adviser over a period of time
- help in accessing work experience training
- access to specialist information about different sectors
- good referral between sources of help relevant to older people including financial advice
- accreditation of existing skills
- support for self-advocacy, as well as advocacy by the adviser, with employers and training providers. This should include campaigns to help change opinion, as well as help in individual cases. It could involve encouraging groups of older adults to support each other and campaign together
- information on equal opportunity and pension legislation, and any special programmes targeted at older workers by government and other providers.

Currently most careers advice for older workers is available outside the workplace. This includes some specialist services for older workers, although these are often victims of short-term funding and there is a policy trend now in the UK towards funding services for all users (DIUS and DWP, 2007) and then focusing delivery for specific target groups as needed.

In response to this some general guidance services have also addressed the needs of older workers. These include publicly-funded, independent and voluntary (third) sector ones. The former group includes the public employment services, which are usually the main source of help for all adults, and are where people can find out about the many special government programmes aimed at older workers. However, they are often also driven by government targets to get people into any work at the expense of those individuals' longer-term goals. The 2003 UK research (DfES), confirmed by Collins (2006) found many older adults were unhappy with the service they received at government Jobcentres where staff may not have enough time to give the help that many older users need. To some extent this is also true of other government-funded services (in the UK, the *nextstep* service caters for people with qualifications below level 2, that of secondary school leavers), but individual centres have been able to introduce special programmes for older clients. The *learndirect Advice* telephone line and web-based system is now

promoting itself clearly to older users with a campaign 'Working life begins at 50' (www.learndirect-advice.co.uk), backed up by comprehensive web resources at www.fiftyforward.co.uk.

There are some independent specialist third-age agencies and, as stated, many of the private career advice and agencies and redundancy advisers work with senior or older employees, so are seeing many over 50s. The voluntary sector is active in community-based provision for unemployed people, including older adults. Courses for older adults thinking about job change are popular and effective especially when combined with one-to-one guidance over the period of the course (Clayton et al., 2007). Besides the chance for assessment and information, one of their greatest strengths is the opportunity to build friendships and networks with other people in similar circumstances.

Within the workplace career guidance is available in-house in some larger companies, where the business case has been made both for guidance, and for the benefit of retaining older staff. As we found in the recent study on workplace guidance generally (Jackson, 2008), however, these tend to favour higher qualified employees. Trade Unions have an important role in reaching employees who do not fall in those favoured groups. In the UK unions have been active in developing workplace signposting, if not full guidance, through the Trades Union Congress' Union Learning Representative system and this has involved many people over 50 (for information on this, see the Unionlearn 'Supporting Learning' webpage www.unionlearn.org.uk/advice/index.cfm and Haughton, 2008). The Age Employment Network has published a good practice guide for Human Resource departments (TAEN, 2007).

Sector-specific agencies are playing an increasingly important part in career guidance for people in employment, those in sectors where early exit is normal are more likely to have programmes to advise older adults. Examples from the UK where this has happened include the armed forces and the fire service, both of which have active re-employment agencies with training advice.

What is still needed?

Policy statements at national and European level commonly include reference to the importance of retaining over 50s in the labour market. What is needed now are initiatives from government and from employers to turn this into a reality. At a European level, clear guidelines similar to those developed by The Age Employment Network on what is needed by older adults, could disseminate these ideas. Government incentives could encourage employers of all sizes to consider the career development needs of their older workforce. Public funding for adult external guidance services could be made conditional on services meeting the needs of older adults. As well as guidance services in the workplace and outside it, many older adults need longer programmes of coaching in jobsearch and career planning skills. These could be developed by colleges and training providers. Research has shown that these services are wanted by adults and are effective when provided. They need now to be transferred from the transitory project funding where they have hitherto been located and incorporated into mainstream provision.

References

Arthur, M. B., Inkson, K. and Pringle, J. K. (1999). *The New Careers: Individual Action and Economic Change*. London: Sage.

Clayton, P. M., Greco, S. and Persson, M. (eds). (2007). *Guidance for Life: Working and Learning in the Third Age*. Milan, Italy: FrancoAngeli.

Collins, C. (2006). *Not ready for the scrap heap: looking for work after 50*. London: Age Concern www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/policy_report_scrapheap.asp

Department for Education and Skills. (2003). *Challenging Age: Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups*. Department for Education and Skills www.taen.org.uk/Publications/Challenging%20age.pdf.

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and the Department for Work and Pensions. (2007). *Opportunity, Employment and Progression*. Norwich: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

European Commission. (2005). *Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations*. Green Paper COM(2005) 94. Brussels: European Commission.

European Commission. (2007). *Employment in Europe 2006*. [http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_analysis/eie/eie2006_summary_en.pdf].

Ford, G. (2005). *Am I Still Needed?* Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies.

Ford, G. (2006). *The Turner Report on Pensions: Implications for Career Guidance*. London: TAEN www.taen.org.uk/Publications/.

Ford, G., McNair, S., Grattan, P. and Lamb, H. (2007). *The impact of an ageing population on career guidance*. A paper for the government review of Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults. NIACE with The Age Employment Network and the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby. Unpublished.

Ford, G. and Clayton, P. (2007). *Improving Learning and Career Guidance for Older People: Good Practice Guide for Career Guidance Practitioners, Policymakers, Social Partners and Employers*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow. www.gla.ac.uk/tag/tag_gpg.pdf.

Grattan, P. (2006). *Ageing and employment: looking back, looking forward*. London: TAEN www.taen.org.uk/resources/work.htm.

Haughton, L. (2008). 'Supporting Learners through Trade Unions in England'. *Career Research and Development, No. 20*. Cambridge: CRAC

HM Government. (2005). *Opportunity Age: Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century*. London: Department of Work and Pensions, www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/opportunity_age/opportunity-age-volume1.pdf.

Jackson, C. (2008). 'Career Guidance for Workforce Development'. *Career Research and Development, No. 20*. Cambridge: CRAC

Kidd, J. M. (2006). *Understanding Career Counselling: Theory, Research and Practice*. London: Sage.

New Zealand Department of Labour. (2006). *45 Plus: Choices in the Labour Market*. Wellington NZ: Department of Labour http://www.dol.govt.nz/browse-dol.asp.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2004). *Career Guidance: a Handbook for Policy Makers*. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/53/34060761.pdf.

Owen-Hussey, L., McNair, S. and Flynn, M. (2006). *Age Discrimination: a lived experience and the employer dimension.* Guildford: Centre for Research into the Older Workforce.

Soulsby, J. (2004). *Stage Posts?, Older and Bolder.* Leicester: National Institute for Adult Continuing Education. Unpublished.

Sultana, R. G. (2004). *Guidance policies in the knowledge society*. Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP.

The Age Employment Network. (2007a). *Government Programmes on Employment and Age*. London: TAEN Briefing www.taen.org.uk/resources/work.htm.

The Age Employment Network. (2007b). *Managing the ageing workforce: an introductory guide to age management for HR professionals*. London: TAEN.

Third Age Guidance project reports (2007). A full list of the documents are available from www.gla.ac.uk/tag.

For correspondence
Ruth Hawthorn, NICEC Senior Fellow

E-mail: ruthhawthorn@btopenworld.com

Walking the e-walk: lifelong learning for all

This article is based on a paper delivered at the International Professional Development Association Conference in Stirling, 1-2 December 2006.

Dr Barbara Bassot

In 2005 the Centre for Career and Personal Development at Canterbury Christ Church University designed a Certificate in Careers Education and Guidance course delivered by e-learning. The course is aimed at people involved in careers work in schools, many of whom are qualified teachers, and it began in October of that year. This paper will present an evaluation study of the experiences of one group of students who completed the course that year. It will begin with a discussion of the rationale for the course itself and its design in relation to the theory and practice of e-learning and continuing professional development. This will be followed by a critique of the qualitative methodology of the study and an analysis of the data gathered. It will conclude with recommendations for schools and others involved in education who may wish to encourage their staff to engage in CPD through e-learning, and for universities who may wish to develop such provision.

Introduction and rationale for the course

This paper focuses on an evaluation of the experiences of a group of participants who undertook the Certificate in Careers Education and Guidance (CEG) in 2005-06. The policy background is described in order to set the scene, followed by a description of the structure of the course and its aims. The paper then goes on to outline the methodology of the evaluation study and an analysis of the data gathered. It concludes with recommendations for practice.

Following the introduction of the Connexions strategy and service (DfEE, 2000), a range of delivery models for Careers Education and Guidance (CEG) evolved in England. In some areas the responsibility for CEG became subsumed within the broader Connexions strategy of supporting young people holistically (an integrated approach), and in others responsibilities for CEG were contracted out to specialist providers with expertise in this area (a contracted out approach).

Following the adoption of an integrated approach, one Connexions partnership contacted a member of staff from Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) in order to discuss their current CEG education and training needs. Within the partnership, many Connexions personal advisers (PAs) staff had entered the service from a variety of different professional backgrounds. In addition many of the staff with knowledge and expertise in careers work had left the organisation, leaving a recognised knowledge and skills gap. As a result, many of the staff were being asked to deliver CEG with little previous knowledge and experience of careers work. In addition, staff in schools had not always had the opportunity to access relevant professional training and development because of the pressures of timetabled commitments. Schools within the partnership area were keen for careers work to be developed and for staff to receive good quality education and training in this area.

At the same time, CCCU had been designing and writing a Certificate in CEG course to be delivered through blended learning. The course comprises materials written specifically for the course and available on Blackboard its virtual learning environment, discussion boards (again on Blackboard), group tutorials and written assignments. The course had been designed using e-learning, as CCCU had recognised from its long experience of running similar courses combining distance and face-to-face learning that careers teachers had increasingly found it difficult to take time out of school to attend in-service training opportunities.

Following an initial meeting with staff from the partnership it was decided to offer a Certificate course for pairs of staff; the careers co-ordinator and the PA from a particular school. In this way it was hoped that together they could have a greater impact on the CEG programme in the school and act as a force for change. The course was run as a pilot with a planned evaluation, in order to gather feedback and make any appropriate changes, in order to assess how the course could best be offered in the future.

The course itself

The Certificate in CEG is structured as follows:

THEMES	CERTIFICATE COURSE	
	Course 1: Understanding Careers Education and Guidance	**Course 2: Providing Careers Education and Guidance**
Developing your practice	Unit 1: The scope and value of CEG	Unit 5: Methods and techniques
Developing your role in CEG	Unit 2: Reviewing your role in CEG	Unit 6: Facilitating young people's career learning and development
Developing CEG in your organisational setting	Unit 3: Integrated CEG	Unit 7: Delivering and entitlement to CEG
Harnessing support for developing CEG	Unit 4: Policy and practice	Unit 8: Working with partners

The course materials were written by Anthony Barnes, a recognised expert in the field of CEG and are accessed through the university's virtual learning platform, Blackboard. The participants were already working as careers professionals and the course materials were written in order to enable them to reflect on and learn from their professional experience (Kolb, 1984). The materials themselves are rooted in professional practice, with readings and activities relevant to the work setting. The course provides a strong blend of theory, policy and practice in relation to CEG, and seeks to equip people with the knowledge and understanding they need to evaluate and seek to improve provision. It also enables people to develop their practice giving a careers-related qualification with HE credits to those who complete successfully, thereby facilitating lifelong career learning amongst the participants.

Evidence of Salmon's (2000; 2002) five-stage framework can be seen in the design of the course and these will now be highlighted. The course began in mid October 2005 with a half day induction (Stage 1 access and motivation) and the aim of this was to introduce participants to the course and to Blackboard. The session gave participants the opportunity to become familiar with the technology and to gain an overview of the demands of the course. It was held in an IT room at the service's local training centre, with each participant having access to a PC, so that the session could be as active as possible. The practical issues of passwords, login procedures, e mail accounts and course registration were dealt with and every participant had the opportunity to send and receive e mails and to participate in a discussion board designed to help them to practise communicating with a group of people online and to build their confidence. Dates for four future group meetings and the two deadline dates for assignments were negotiated and set. Some time was also spent in scheduling activities, so that the participants had a picture of what the course involved; Module 1 was to be studied until mid-February, and Module 2 from then until the second week of June.

Salmon stages

Stage 1: access & motivation

Stage 2: online socialisation

Stage 3: information exchange

Stage 4: knowledge construction

Stage 5: development

Four weeks later the first group meeting was held and the time was spent discussing progress so far and in helping two people who had joined the course late to complete their registration process and access the materials. The participants spent time in small groups discussing the theory covered in the course to date and in discussing strategies for success. Although the session was held face to face, many of the processes mirrored Stage 2 of Salmon's process in relation to socialisation.

The second group meeting was held towards the end of January, and it was devoted to preparation for the Module 1 assignment due to be submitted towards the end of February. During the meeting the task was explained and discussed, the relevant literature was reviewed and sources

to help with Harvard referencing were highlighted. By this time the discussion boards were in fairly regular use by some members, and participants had begun to share information (Stage 3). Following the meeting participants wrote their first assignment and engaged in knowledge construction (Stage 4).

The third group meeting was held in early April the time was spent discussing the Module 2 material, accessing useful websites and on an introduction to the second assignment.

The last group meeting was held in mid May and was devoted to the preparation for the second assignment, along with some time for individual tutorials for those who wanted them. Following this all participants submitted either a careers programme for their own school that they had constructed in the light of what they had learned on the course, or a critique of a careers event planned and carried out in partnership with other organisations (Stage 5).

Initially 12 people started the course and six completed successfully, with a full range of marks awarded, from pass to distinction. No-one failed a piece of work, and it was clear that all of the participants had constructed valuable knowledge and understanding of careers work and had developed knowledge and skills in relation to careers work. The quality of the work submitted was such that it was suggested to two of the participants that they consider disseminating their work through conferences and publication. Of the six who withdrew, two left the service and four (including the two careers co-ordinators on the course) decided not to continue.

Methodology

In order to undertake a thorough and reflective evaluation of the course an interpretivist case study method was used. This particular case study was qualitative, and, as Stake (2000:435) argues, 'Case studies have become one of the most common ways to do qualitative inquiry'. As a method, case studies serve as a means of gaining more knowledge of the world and in this particular case, the world of the participants and their continuing professional development in relation to careers work. All participants (including those who withdrew from the course) were asked to take part in a one-to-one interview with the course tutor which took place in the partnership's office. As the tutor had built strong positive relationships with the participants (particularly those who had completed the course), the interviews were seen as a means of gathering rich data and a range of views on the experiences of doing the course. Interviews were chosen in preference to questionnaires in order to try and gain the in-depth views of the participants. Prior to the start of the interviews the tutor concerned assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity, and asked for honesty regarding the weaknesses of the course as well as the strengths. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, with each participant being asked the same set of questions. Two separate sets of questions were devised; one for those who completed successfully and one for those who withdrew. Each interview lasted approximately half an hour.

During the interviews the tutor took detailed notes. These were given to the participants immediately after their interview for checking. If any participant felt they had been misrepresented in any way, they were given the opportunity to change the notes in order to reflect their views more accurately. One participant chose to make a minor amendment to the notes under one question, otherwise the notes were all accepted.

Five out of the six people who completed the course successfully were interviewed, with the sixth being interviewed over the phone the following week. None of the people who withdrew from the course accepted the offer of an interview, and all were telephoned three times during the month of the evaluation in order to seek to gain their views. Unfortunately, only one response was received, and this person was again interviewed over the telephone. It is possible that the people who withdrew from the course would have felt more comfortable being interviewed by someone not involved in the course, rather than the course tutor, although this was not possible within the timeframe of the study.

Data analysis

The interviews began with general questions regarding the course and moved on to more specific areas. This analysis will begin with the views of those who completed the course successfully.

The learning experience

When asked what was good about the course the participants all responded positively and said that they had enjoyed it. The content of the materials was described as:

"really interesting and pertinent"

and

"relevant to my last job and to this one."

One participant described the course as:

"…a very sharp learning curve… [it] opened my eyes. [As an experienced person] you think you know it all, but you don't. There was a lot of reading but it was extremely illuminating and worthwhile."

Another said:

"I have done NVQs and I hate them – ticking boxes, jumping through hoops, little thinking. This was academic and I liked it. We were treated as professionals and spoken to as adults. It was pitched at a high level."

When asked to describe what was not good about the course three participants said that the reading was difficult and there was too much of it, with one participant using the word overwhelming. This made the course seem heavy:

"…'it made me wonder whether I had bitten off more than I could chew… I found it difficult to pace myself."

As expected participants found that much of the literature was new to them, particularly to those without a background in careers work. One said that it would be useful:

"…to have a checklist to tick off. Knowing what's the minimum I need to read – read A, B, C and D and the rest are extras for supplementary reading."

However, the reading material was generally found to be interesting and stimulating.

When asked about the difficulties they had experienced a range of responses were given. Most participants said they had found managing the course whilst working challenging, and experienced some difficulties in getting everything done (e.g. reading and assignments). One person found the structure of the course confusing and one other had difficulties finding references for their work. One participant said that she felt it did not suit her learning style, as she felt that she was more practical than academic.

Comments on the quality of the course materials ranged from *'brilliant'*, *'first class'* to *'quite relevant'*, with *'really comprehensive and really interesting'* also included. However, one person said that the load was heavy with another commenting on the large amount of theory in the first module and the lack of it in the second.

Learning technologies

All the participants found the Blackboard site easy to use and generally user friendly. One person commented that some documents were not easy to find, as they were not in an obvious place. Again the comment was made by one person that they found the amount of information on Blackboard overwhelming. The participants used the Blackboard site in varying amounts; some said they used it a lot, particularly during the first module and others used it in a more focused way around assignment deadlines.

There was a variable response to the usefulness of the discussion boards on Blackboard. One participant liked them, but others found them false and would have preferred face-to-face discussions. Two participants raised important points regarding confidence issues in relation to this. For example, in relation to their contribution, one person said:

"…you write, send it and it's set in stone. I suppose it's to do with confidence. Is anyone going to be interested in what I have to say?"

whilst another said:

"In module 2 I thought I would use the discussion boards, but I didn't. I didn't want to sound like I didn't know what I was talking about."

Support and assessment

A range of responses was received form the participants regarding the group meetings. Most felt that they were very good and very useful and appreciated and one described them as

"really supportive and motivating"

and

"I wouldn't have done the assignments without them."

People commented on the way the tutor came with an agenda, but was flexible to meet the needs of the people in the group and created an environment:

"…for us to be open and honest and say what we felt."

One participant commented on the attitude of the teachers on the course:

"I didn't like the attitude of the teachers. Flippant and blasé. I know better"

and said:

"…it was better after all those who dropped out went."

Another participant said that they would have liked more structure to the meetings and one also said that the meetings could be condensed into a morning.

In relation to the assessed work most participants said they felt well prepared following the group meetings. One participant said they felt more prepared for the second assignment than for the first:

"I had no gauge as to whether I would pass or not."

Another participant did not feel well prepared for the first assignment, and by the second had become very involved in all the reading, so:

"I spent two days cutting it down, as I had done so much. I definitely felt more confident by this time."

Both assignments were found to be appropriate and relevant and participants liked having a choice of tasks. The Module 1 assignment was described as:

"incredibly necessary'

and

"foundational'

whilst the Module 2 assignment was said to be:

"absolutely relevant. I had something already that I could use."

One participant said:

"…the first assignment was relevant to the stage of my professional development and was really useful. I have been in the same school for two and a half years and now I have the background I know what should be going on. It gave me the ammunition to go back to my school."

On a disappointing note the participant also said:

"My careers co-ordinator was invited to do the course but didn't."

The importance of detailed and constructive feedback was highlighted and all participants commented positively on the feedback they received and felt that it was constructive in pointing out areas for development. One participant said:

"The comments in the margins were like you were having a conversation. I really liked it, it felt personal and that my work was valued. I knew where my weaknesses were and if I'd had to do it again, I would have known exactly what to do."

The following points were made in relation to things on the course that could be changed; more group contact time, allocated study time, a professional library, a study room and studying alongside teachers throughout the course. Some final points raised were the need to warn people about the level of the course and the commitment needed. One participant commented:

"…new people doing NVQ don't seem to get this."

Unfortunately during the review it was only possible to speak to one of the participants who withdrew from the course. Their reasons for withdrawal related to the way in which the course was explained at the outset and their view of their own needs in relation to professional development. It was described as:

"…a short course to help me work more closely with my careers co-ordinator. I wanted to do this, but I was in no position to do a year's course. I was persuaded to come along, but it was far too much for me. It was not enhancing what I did and not right for me. I wanted a short course."

Some concluding recommendations and remarks

The evaluation showed that the way in which a course is introduced is vital to motivation to study and the likelihood that participants will complete successfully. Those who were asked to do the course and did not wish to participate dropped out in the early stages. In addition, the person who thought it was a short course also dropped out because it did not fulfil her expectations. The most disappointing aspect of the study was that the innovative idea of having PAs and teachers studying together and becoming forces for change failed, in that only two teachers started the course, and both dropped out. The reasons for this are somewhat unclear, due to the lack of participation on the part of the teachers in both the course and the evaluation. However, one possible reason could be a lack of a culture of CPD amongst the schools, in contrast to the vibrant CPD culture within the partnership.

In promoting a course (whether it is by e-learning or not) it appears essential to present accurate information, including its academic nature and to work with volunteers rather than conscripts. It is vital to recruit participants to the programme who are actively interested in doing the course and wanting to develop themselves within the professional CEG arena through an academic course. Drop-out can be expected to be high if people are asked to undertake the programme when they do not want to do this of their own accord. In addition, it is important to consider the learning styles of the participants. One participant said that she felt it did not suit her learning style, as she felt that she was more practical than academic. Another said:

"…the information we were given in advance was lacking. Some felt bullied or pushed into doing the course. That's why there was a big drop-out rate. It's only fair to tell people that there's a lot of theory. It was fine for me, but not for everyone."

In order to make information on the course accessible to prospective participants, the university could run a familiarisation session with staff who are interested in the course. This would give people the opportunity to see the materials, try the Blackboard site and have a discussion on the academic nature of the course with the course tutor.

Such a session done well could do much to dismiss any fears about using the technology. Study time for participants is necessary if they are to gain the maximum benefit from the course, and additional non-tutor led group meetings where participants undertake activities in the course materials together could also be considered. The evaluation showed that the reading on the course should be prioritised for participants, with an indication of what is essential and what is recommended as non essential further reading. This has led to the production of a checklist to help participants understand the structure of the course and to enable them to check their own progress. In some cases this is coupled with a course calendar giving the relevant group meetings and deadlines for assignments. In addition some further work has been done in order to make references to literature easy to find.

In conclusion, participants were asked to summarise how they felt about the certificate course and it was described as valuable, enjoyable and interesting by several people. All participants were glad that they had had the opportunity to do the course and it was described as

"high up on the interest and relevance meter. It really made me think about stuff because it's academic"

"glad I did I" but also "glad that's it."

One participant said:

"If I ran the organisation everyone with an operational role would be on it."

In relation to the lifelong career learning of the participants, it was clear from the work submitted that all course members engaged in a deep level of thinking in relation to their professional practice. They constructed knowledge in relation to CEG and gained relevant skills and understanding. In addition, however, they also reflected on their own career experiences and development and since successfully completing the course one person has been promoted within the partnership into a role that they feel they would not otherwise have gained. However, lifelong career learning lies at the heart of CEG policy and practice and the lack of interest on the part of the teachers towards their own CPD as manifested in the study is surprising, if not somewhat disturbing. One has to question how such professionals can hope to encourage young people to take a proactive approach to their career learning and development when they appear to lack enthusiasm for their own.

It is clear that those people who completed the Certificate course found it very valuable. However, one of the aims of the course was for PAs to study alongside the careers co-ordinators from their schools, and as only two teachers signed up for the course and they subsequently withdrew this was not achieved. Neither of the two teachers took part in the review, so it is impossible to know at this stage what they would have wanted from the course, or indeed if they actually wanted the course at all. In this respect Connexions training managers need to continue to find out their views on this matter, to make sure that the needs of careers co-ordinators are being met in other ways. In this respect it cannot be said that lifelong career learning is for all or that e-learning provides an answer to everyone's CPD needs. In spite of this, the PAs who completed the course spoke of being better equipped to develop CEG within their schools and had enhanced their own professional development in the process. In this respect the course should be viewed as successful, whilst having identifiable areas for improvement.

References

Department for Education and Employment. (2000). *Connexions. The best start in life for every young person,* [online] Nottingham, DfEE publications available from http://eduwight.iow.gov.uk/the_lea/policies_plans/images/2ZConnexions_1.pdf [accessed 25 October 2006]

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development.* London: Prentice-Hall.

Salmon, G. (2000). *E Moderating the Key to Teaching and Learning Online.* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Salmon, G. (2002). *E tivities the Key to Active Online Learning*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Stake, R.E. (2000). 'The case study method in social inquiry'. In Gomm, R., Hammersley, M. and Foster, P. (eds.) *Case Study Method*, pp.19–26. London: Sage.

For correspondence
Dr Barbara Bassot, Centre for Career and Personal Development, Canterbury Christ Church University

E-mail: barbara.bassot@canterbury.ac.uk

Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal Summer 2008

Contents

NICEC
National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal is published by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation.