

## The Educationalising of Work? - Changing Attitudes to Education amongst the Skilled Working Class

Dennis Hayes

**Most studies of the education, training or career needs of young people and adults concentrate on the illiterate or socially excluded. This paper uses the findings of three empirical studies of the attitudes of aspirant skilled workers to redress the balance and to provide an accurate picture of the attitudes of ordinary people to education. These empirical studies have been followed up with interviews and discussions with policy makers. The results will overturn many of the assumptions made by educational researchers and policy makers. The research indicates several things. There is no evidence of a skills gap or a need for IT training. However, there is a gap between what educational policy makers and providers want to offer and what might be taken up. There is a desire for traditional forms of education. But the most striking result of the surveys is that in the workplace itself education is everything. The vocationalising of education has been paralleled by the educationalising of work.**

### Introduction

This paper is a discussion of the attitudes of skilled workers to work and education. It is based on interviews with five hundred skilled workers carried out in Basildon during the

summer following the general election of 1997 and subsequent discussions with local policy makers, focus groups and individuals (Hayes & Hudson, 2001a). It draws upon a previous survey by the same researchers of a similar group of five hundred skilled workers carried out in Basildon during the summer following the general election of 1992 (Hayes & Hudson, 2001b). We began in that year with what we thought was a one-off visit to see if there was any empirical evidence to support the sociological claims being made about the existence of a 'new working class' that had adopted Thatcherite values. We returned to Basildon to review our original conclusions and to broaden the survey. Our original focus and concerns had been narrowly political. In the intervening five years they seemed to us strangely outdated. In a post-political period we had to ask a different set of questions to enable us to understand what people really thought. Education now figured more centrally in this new set of questions. This second survey also gave us the opportunity to repeat and explore further questions we had asked in another survey of 1000 workers (Hudson, Hayes & Andrew, 1996). A third survey is planned for the period after the next general election.

### A methodological note

Our intention is not just to reproduce empirical material. Ian Christie (1999) has criticised sociologists and others for widening 'the gap between theory and empirical research' Sociology, he argued, no longer registers with the public, despite its theoretical insights. This paper is part of an attempt to bridge that gap by testing theories, opinions and assumptions by uncovering what people really think. In 1992 and still in 1997 this was

something also neglected by the majority of sociologists. Our aim was to go beyond the related but entirely untheoretical world of market surveys and make a serious attempt to explore and analyse the views of our public, the aspirant skilled workers of Basildon.

### Why Basildon?

Basildon was the seventh and last of the post-war new towns. In 1999 Basildon saw its fiftieth anniversary. There is much that makes Basildon typical of many towns today: the shift to home ownership; the demographic changes; and the move from manufacturing to service industries. Indeed, as it matures, Basildon is much more representative of Britain than it used to be as a new town. This is a good enough reason to study Basildon, but while it is becoming more representative, it is still unique.

The sociological uniqueness of Basildon lies in the sheer numbers of workers who are classified as skilled. Basildon simply has a higher percentage of skilled workers than any other town in England. Everyone from Basildon Council to Sun journalists emphasise this point: '30% of workers are in professional/managerial posts and 51% hold skilled/semi-skilled jobs – higher than the national average' (Basildon Fact File, The Sun 9/12/96).

But data that interests sociologists is not sufficient to explain popular interest in and caricaturing of this group of workers. The special feature that shines through in the attitude of Basildon's skilled workers is aspiration. Therefore, we can best categorise this group as seeking to better itself. This group will, if found in sufficient numbers in a geographical place, be the testing ground for political ideas and voting patterns. For this reason, shifts

in attitudes to education and work are more illuminating if studied in this group than in any other. Policy makers and educationalists today tend to concentrate on those who need basic skills or are socially excluded rather than the aspirant worker. The danger of these pre-occupations is that the policy initiatives that flow from them may become increasingly irrelevant to many ordinary people.

### Overview of the provisional findings

We found that education rose in importance to the people of Basildon over the 1990s. There are two ways in which this desire for education comes out strongly in our survey. It is, alongside health, the most prioritised area for increased government expenditure and it is the factor people identified as the most important in promoting their personal and career development. This latter and more individualised desire for education is clearly linked to work but it not always purely vocational. There is some emphasis on the value of something resembling a traditional liberal education.

We found the desire for education vague in that it was not linked to any particular policy demands in the way that the first generation of Basildonians argued for comprehensive education. Nor did people mention any particular remedial measures that were necessary to improve the existing state of schools. Where criticisms were made, it was often teachers who were the target. Again these criticisms were vague. Teachers were held to have 'let people down' or to 'be against change'. Education was also vague as an individual aspiration in the sense that no-one in our sample mentioned a particular course or training that they want to undertake. The closest we could get was a 'degree' or a 'college course'.

### What were the real concerns of Basildonians?

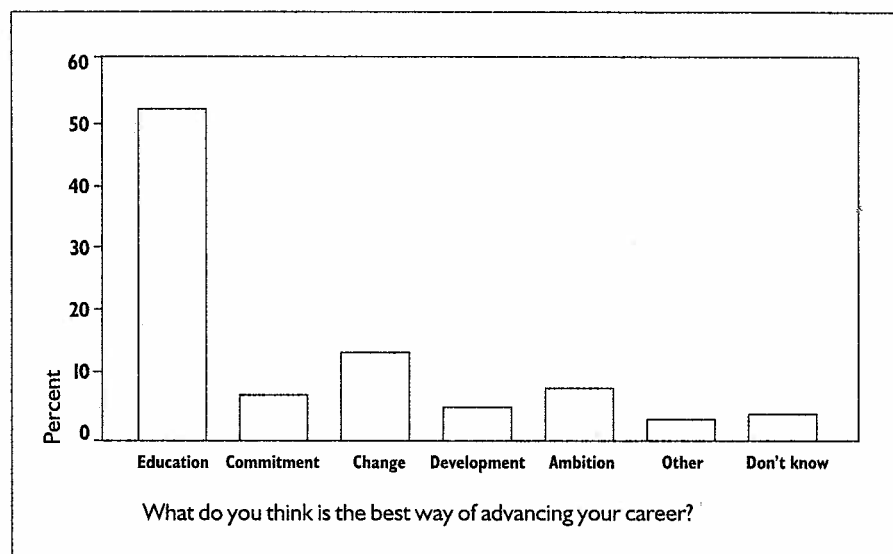
When asked to identify their real concerns by choosing up to three, 60%

included 'health' while 45% identified 'education'. Education came behind health, unemployment and crime as a choice. In 1992 it was only mentioned by 27% of respondents. This increase of 18 percentage points is the largest we identified and is matched only by an increase of 15 percentage points in worries about health.

When asked what the government should spend more money on, health and education are the first and most significant choices, but a gap appears between the two. In the case of health it is a major concern for 60% and a choice of 49% to increase spending on. Education is a concern for 45% but only 22% of respondents want to spend more money on it. Do these gaps of 11 percentage points and 23 percentage points respectively reflect a sense that more spending means better health care but not necessarily a better education? Our qualitative interviews and discussions confirm that this is the case (see below).

### Education at work

When asked 'What do you think is the best way of advancing your career?' 52% said education and training. This was an increase from 31% in our national survey of attitudes to work (Hudson *et al.*, 1996). If we add 'Staff Development' to this we get 56% compared with 37% in the earlier findings. A change of job is still quite the positive choice of 15% of respondents. This latter response shows some confidence in our respondents' individual abilities to get on. But so does the faith in education and training. It is important to stress how new and individualised this response is.



In the fifties and sixties education was hardly mentioned in studies of the skilled worker. In the classic study of embourgeoisement, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968), education and training are discussed solely in the specific context of the possibility of becoming a foreman. In distinct contrast with our group of skilled workers in Basildon, all of who had undertaken training, Goldthorpe *et al.*'s sample of semi-skilled and skilled workers, 85% left school at 14 or under and only 15% had any subsequent part-time vocational training.

### Lifelong learning

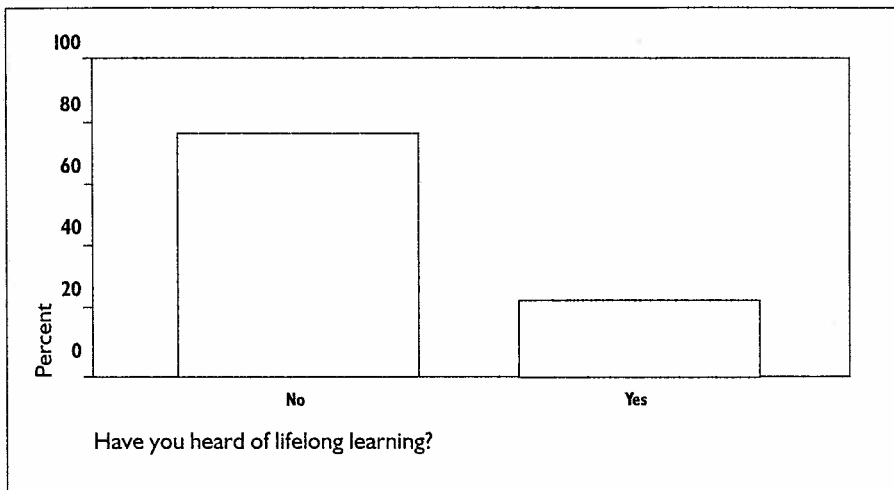
The year before our survey was the European Year of Lifelong Learning. It was discussed and celebrated at conference after conference and in report after report. Both the Conservative government and New Labour argued for the necessity to create a culture of lifelong learning. The emphasis placed by Basildonians on education as a way to develop their careers might be considered support for just such an idea. However, this concept had no impact at the time of our survey.

Only 23 per cent of respondents claimed to have heard of the phrase 'lifelong learning', and when asked to specify what it meant, most formulated a response that referred to past experience or suggested they did not have a clue. They made comments like 'going back to college' or 'to keep on learning'. Of course, this may change and the terminology may become more commonly understood, partly as a consequence of DfEE and other government publicity campaigns.

**Policy implications**

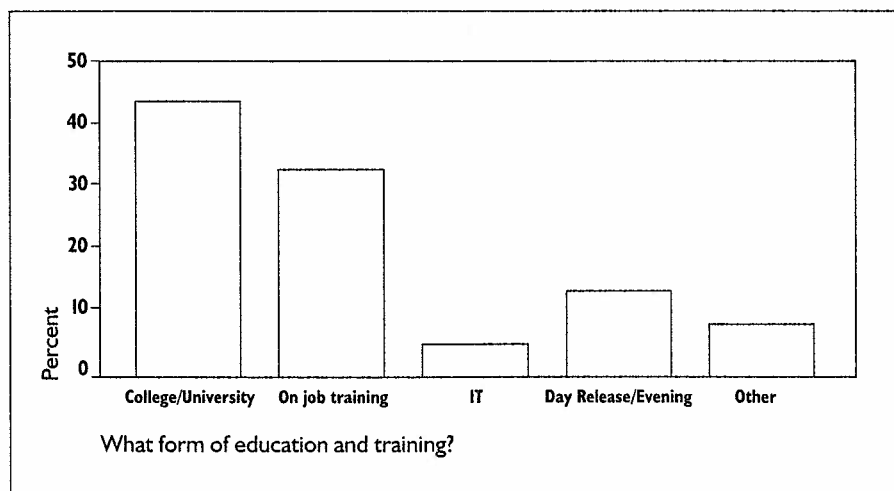
The increasing concern with education is not based on anything substantial. No strong view of crumbling and failing schools, of the need for youth training and qualifications for entry to the labour market, or of the need for 'lifelong learning', came across from our respondents. Not a single respondent identified the need for 'basic skills' teaching. In our in-depth interviews, technical IT or engineering skill updating was held to be either unnecessary or easily achieved through workplace training. Recognising the particular nature of our sample of skilled workers, this presents a problem for national and local educational policy makers who continue to emphasise policies aimed at those who need literacy and numeracy skills as well as those associated with employability. We claim not that these policies are wrong but that the majority of Basildonians are already committed to education and therefore these policies have no application to them.

The emphasis put by the local council on the East Basildon Education Action Zone (EAZ) indicates that there are others in Basildon for whom raising of basic educational standards is a priority. Education Action Zones aim to be innovative in tackling disadvantage and to raising standards through a partnership approach involving the schools, local authority and parents, but above all it prescribes a central role for business. There is hope among policy makers that this will have an effect in a relatively deprived area of Basildon, but early research indicates that zones bring little in the way of innovation; rather you get a repackaging of what provision already exists (Pye, 1999). This may, however, achieve one desired end in promoting a re-alignment of professionals with an interest in improving educational provision. Given that it is the attitudes of teachers and others that are criticised by Basildonians (see below), the EAZ may initiate some welcome change. A minimum requirement for this would be a willingness to address these criticisms in other than a defensive



**What form of education and training do they want?**

When asked what form career advancement would take, 43.7% of those responding suggested College or University, and 32.5% on-the-job training (44.4% if we add day release and evening classes); only 4.8% sought IT training. There is a considerable endorsement of on-the-job training here. The low demand for IT training might relate to this being a unique sample of the skilled working class. It may be that they already have this training. Some 10% of our sample were working as specialists in work related to statistical analysis, design or IT. IT can be seen as part of an 'upskilling' or 'reskilling' trend in the work place. It certainly has implications for employers and education/training providers, because further training will have to be at an advanced level to attract these workers.



There remains a strong commitment to traditional forms of education but there is substantial support for training at work. The former may be evidence of the shift towards the demand for 'soft' skills in the new customer-oriented workplace, while the latter might be considered recognition of the reality of 'credentialism' – the need to have a certificate to show that you have the skills to do the job.

fashion. Whatever the result of this initiative in Basildon, it is situated in an area where educational need may match existing policy. Our argument would be that the area where the EAZ is based is atypical and that to win general support policy must meet general aspirations such as the need for more committed teachers.

The emphasis on education carries little information for policy makers if considered in purely material terms. More money spent on school buildings, equipment and more teachers would not necessarily remove the concern. Our evidence for this is mostly negative although it was a possible explanation of the statistical gap between education as a concern and as a spending priority discussed earlier. Information from the teachers we talked to and our visits to schools and to Basildon College did not leave the impression of a decaying and under-resourced educational environment. Like the town, the schools are relatively new even if their architecture is now unfashionable. Our respondents spoke in very specific terms about the state of houses and shops and roads and did not mention any specific educational needs. The only concerns that came out in our interviews were with the failures of teachers as a group. This appears to be a concern across the generations and may have something to do with the difficulties of attracting good teachers to the area. One respondent articulated a not uncommon assessment of teachers:

'They're not properly educated. They don't know anything. Especially those that come to Basildon. They despise the kids. They say things like "What can you expect from the kids from round here!" It's not the kids that are the problem: it's the teachers'.

Another respondent told us 'They will live anywhere but Basildon'. Good teachers and positive experiences were the exception amongst our respondents.

The real policy challenge would be to give content to their desire for that college course or degree. It may be that

the issue is simply that what is needed is something like a re-packaging of a liberal education. The vagueness of the Basildonian desire for education and the absence of any clear notion of the content of it is unsurprising after two decades of government policy that subordinated the education system to a narrow economic vision we know as the 'new vocationalism'.

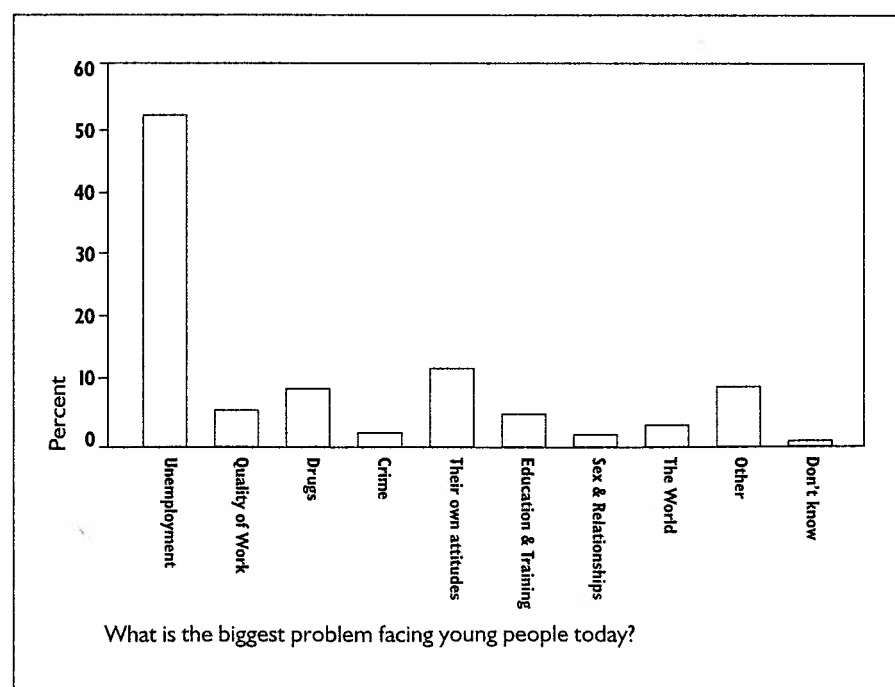
Our sample of skilled workers are, by definition, trained and educated beyond a basic level. This means that policy solutions must reflect a higher level of educational need. The issue is not one of *meeting* complex needs but of *determining* those needs.

There is evidence based upon workplace initiatives (see below) that a direct grant to adults would encourage immediate participation in a new liberal education, although the absence of a grant would not preclude it. Participation might be facilitated by a university annex being set up in the town. Such innovations are happening elsewhere. Policy makers might like to consider these options. However, on the basis of our evidence and experience, Basildonians can be left to, and will, make their own choices about their education.

### Unemployment and training

The major concern in our 1992 survey was with unemployment. 58.7% of our respondents mentioned it. In 1997 concern with unemployment remained high. There was a decline of just 6.1% in 1997, with 53% of respondents citing it. However, this relatively small decline in concern is at variance with the reality of (un)employment in present day Basildon. Unemployment in 1992 was higher than the national average at 10%. It peaked at 12% in 1993 and declined to 4% in 1998. At the time of our second survey it stood at 6%. Long-term youth unemployment is virtually non-existent in Basildon. At present there are only 61 young people falling into this category.

Basildonians' worries about unemployment may seem to be an expression of the residual fears and memories of the Thatcherite years and of a generation that experienced a relatively jobless youth. 53% of our sample indicated unemployment as a major concern. Surprisingly, given the facts, 62% of young people are worried about the prospect of unemployment. This is matched only by the concerns of the 45-plus age group. The fear of unemployment was further confirmed when we asked the direct question 'What is the biggest problem facing young people today?'



Unemployment is seen as the main problem for youth (53%) followed by minor concerns about 'their own attitudes' (11.4%), drugs (8%) and the quality of work (6.4%). These perceptions are shared across the generations. These are surprising findings for policy makers. In the town where Leah Betts died, drugs are not perceived as a major problem for youth. Nor is crime. Youth themselves are less than half as likely to be worried about crime. The overwhelming fear is of unemployment.

There was little evidence that this was a problem related to young people's training needs. Only 2% of our respondents felt that the government should spend more money on youth training. Only 4.8% identified education and training as a problem for youth. The view was expressed that this sort of training came with a job. There was no concern that a lack of basic job training would actually bring about unemployment.

There was some indication that the attitudes of young people might be a problem. 11.4% of respondents mentioned 'their attitudes' as the biggest problem. This could be related to the perceived absence of the social skills required for new forms of flexible working. Nor is it just the older respondents who make such criticisms. Young people are just as likely to criticise their own generation for attitudinal problems. These criticisms are often strong and are directed against those few young people who lack the normal aspirations of Basildonians. The reality is that these are mythological figures. There are just too few young unemployed people.

A more likely explanation for the concern with unemployment could be that in the changing world of work anxieties traditionally associated with young people, such as short-term working, with periods of unemployment and job searching, are now generalised across all age ranges. As with almost all of our findings, there was no significant difference between generations. Older, more experienced and skilled workers now have the same anxieties as youth. However, we found that Basildonians' attitudes to the new flexible workplace and to frequent job changes was positive. The prospect of the changed workplace was accepted, not feared.

All our respondents were employed and it appears that the concern with unemployment is just given or is a residual fear of the return of what Basildon life is supposed to guard against through the opportunity the town offers to get a decent job and better yourself.

### **Individuation: the collapse of collectivity**

Fear of unemployment may also be the result of the decline of traditional institutions associated with the welfare state and the labour and trade union movement. Our belief is that a more hazy or vague desire for education is, in part, a natural consequence of the individualisation of the skilled workers of Basildon.

If advancement at work is now sought primarily through education this, in part, reflects the collapse of the trade union movement as an active force in determining workers' pay and conditions. Our findings show a dramatic decline through the generations. Only three of the under 25s in our sample were union members. Union membership has been relatively more stable in the late 1990s, after a dramatic decline. This is due to unions recreating themselves as victim support and insurance agencies. This orientation around individual needs bears no relation to the collective role they once performed. In the past, if no individual advancement was possible within a firm, it was the force of collective action that secured material advancement. The result of the downplaying of the active side of trade unionism is precisely the increasing emphasis on the importance of

education. There is no other way of advancement at the present time.

### **Work and education**

We found evidence in our survey that that there is a growing interconnection between work and education. Why is this? Our answer to the question related to the absence of collectivity. Education is essentially an individual enterprise and is a way of bettering oneself. Given the aspirations of Basildonians and the absence of other ways of improving themselves, they have come to believe that education is everything.

There are other possible explanations that could be advanced to explain the concern that skilled workers have with education. The most appealing to educationalists is that popular idea that we now live in a new knowledge based 'e-society' or are entering a new 'creative age'. Most of the literature that discusses the relationship between work and education is usually concerned with the so-called 'knowledge economy' or 'knowledge capitalism'. A detailed discussion of whether there is any reality behind the claim that we are now through a knowledge revolution or whether this is just self-flattering rhetoric of government departments and human resource managers is beyond the scope of this paper. However, there is evidence that the potential of the new technology is being squandered. Studies of the performance of the US economy show that, whatever the claims, the 'knowledge revolution' does not appear to have impacted on productivity statistics. It is far too early to declare a new era. We can, therefore, put aside the mechanistic view that changes in the economy have affected worker attitudes in some direct and simple way.

It has been also been argued that education has come to the fore as a result of management attempting to counteract the impact of corporate downsizing on employee commitment and morale. The aim was, from the

moment of recruitment, to get employees to internalise management values and attitudes. This involved continuous learning so that employees could 'work smarter' and a recognition by managers that they could do this best if they taught others.

This almost therapeutic process involved several strategies including the use of employee assistance programmes (EAPs). When these began in the 1970s in the US, they aimed to tackle alcohol and drug-related problems. They soon expanded to a wide range of programmes aimed at tackling personal problems that were not related to work. They 'focussed on the individual, emphasising the importance of physical and mental fitness and the improvement of personal lifestyles' (Poynter, 2000, p.42). By the time such a programme was implemented by an international company in Basildon, there was a focus on educational improvement.

The success of the Ford Employee Development and Assistance Programme (EDAP) is instructive in relation to the argument that the concern with education results from management initiatives. Launched in 1989, it was expected that only 5% of employees would take up a grant to study a non-vocational course. As one adult education teacher who was associated with the scheme told us:

'The take up came as a surprise as almost a third of the work force applied for grants. Ford workers were cynical about this as part of their employment package but took the opportunity because it was about personal development, about education. They could study what they liked as long as it was not work-related. This changed later on. It had a great impact on the local colleges and on adult education.'

This scheme soon became directed towards meeting basic skill needs and achieving target numbers of training qualifications. But it does show the weakness in identifying management initiatives as being responsible for their employees' increased interest in education. Management were taken aback by the willingness of large numbers of employees to take advantage of the programme. Educational opportunities were something workers clearly wanted.

A further explanation is that work has changed for reasons that derive from outside the workplace:

'Work is being made to perform or fulfil additional social roles which have nothing to do with the prime function of work as a place for value creation. Work has become more important because of the way the other parts of social life are not working as well as they used to: everything from the family and personal relationships to politics' (Mullan, 2001).

We must recognise that this is a paradoxical relationship. Work is often blamed because, for example, overwork and increased working hours seem to threaten family life, to damage personal relationships and to leave little time for active political involvement. Nor can we assume that, from a personal point of view, work has not become more fulfilling. It is less a source of identity than it once was, but it is all that is left after the collapse of collective welfare state and community institutions. People look to work for self-development opportunities and self-fulfilment because the rest of life is less satisfying. Education is one of the demands now put on work because of changes outside of work.

What we discovered in our survey of skilled workers was a concern with education that supports this wider analysis of the restructuring of work. Basildonians put their faith in education as a way forward at work often because of their unhappy

experience of local authority education, but more importantly because it fills a gap left by the collapse of older methods of work advancement, whether collective (TUs) or individual (changing jobs). But our conclusion should not give heart to employers that their employee development strategies will merge with worker aspirations to create a new harmonious workplace. Education is an individualised self-centred concern. The more workers take responsibility for their personal development and achievements, the more that even the residual elements of workplace collectivity and co-operation will be undermined. The result can only be more fractious relationships at work.

#### Note

This article is based on a paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, Cardiff, 7-9 September 2000.

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## Seeing Beyond the Myths at Work

Carol Stephenson & Mark Erickson

In October 2000 a group of 50 leading academics met at the University of Sunderland to examine the current state of work and employment, both in the UK and abroad. Perhaps more significantly they also met to examine how work and employment is being studied, researched and theorised. The conference was largely based on discussions generated from papers presented by four leading professors of sociology, each with a long history of researching employment, the workplace and workers. These were Huw Beynon of the University of Cardiff, Richard Brown of the University of Durham, Anna Pollert of the University of Greenwich and Paul Stewart of the University of the West of England. Whilst the authors of this article organised the conference to celebrate the publication of our new book (*Myths At Work*, 2000), and to raise issues relating to the academic study of work and workplaces, we found one of the most rewarding aspects of the day was that the conference attracted the attention of a range of practitioners, such as careers guidance staff, who find themselves at the 'hard edge' of the labour market.

There was a general agreement at the conference that during the last two decades there have been profound changes in the organisation of work, and in many respects the world of work has been turned upside down. Yet we also recognised that there is continuity in the world of work and that a number of influential new perspectives on what work is today are actually myths. Careers guidance staff are located at the centre of such discussions: they try to guide people into the rapidly changing world of employment, but often do this against a backdrop of ideological and political pressure.

### Realities and myths

So, what are the realities of work, and what are the myths at work? We need to consider not only the causes and consequences of changes in work and workplaces (which we shall look at below), but also our methods for researching and analysing work and workplaces. Quite simply, a major problem facing anyone who is interested in work and employment today is: whose account of the modern workplace do they listen to? One of the problems in recent years has been in gaining access to research sites, particularly access to 'new workplaces', i.e. workplaces that are characterised by an absence of worker power and trade union influence, dominated by notions of human resource management and employment insecurity. Such environments are wary of researchers who may wish to view their workplace, interview their workers over time and ultimately publish what may be critical

accounts of their employment practices. Trade unions have lost the ability they had in the past to open doors for researchers who are compiling detailed case studies based on a comprehensive understanding of all social actors who feature in the workplace. Huw Beynon's study of industrial relations in the motor industry, *Working For Ford* (1984), and Anna Pollert's account of women tobacco workers, *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* (1981), were only possible because of trade union support.

Frequently, good critical research has been replaced by work which is less than balanced and offers a 'top-down' approach that utilises only the views of managers, industry analysts or leading politicians. A prime example of this trend was *The Machine that Changed the World* by Womack, Jones & Roos (1990). This book examined the international

automobile industry and concluded that in order to survive, all manufacturers must adopt 'lean' work strategies, i.e. must cut back on labour costs, adopt team working and quality control, and curtail or eradicate trade union power. Despite the fact that the research took five years and several millions of dollars to complete, the views of the workers and trade unionists involved do not feature in any way in the book. Consequently, the work has been widely criticised by discerning researchers and employers, and its many recommendations have been disregarded by those who saw the work as an ideologically driven, one-sided account of new work strategies. Nevertheless this piece of research had an immense influence in the business world and contributed to the propagation of the myth that lean production was the only way forward for manufacturing.



### Unbalanced and uncritical workplace studies

Links between business interests and the development of the study of work and industry are not new. There is a strong tradition of industrial sociologists and psychologists working as 'servants of power', and this is hardly surprising given that academics and researchers are frequently paid by the state, its agencies or business-financed corporations. Inevitably there is pressure to be 'accountable' to the paymasters and to produce work that is 'relevant' and 'useful' in their terms. But this tradition has coexisted with another one, namely that of critical studies of workplace relations: a tradition that has its roots in sociology and is informed by the countervailing ethos of academic freedom producing objective social science and value-free research. It was to that tradition that many of those attending the conference in October 2000 wished to see a return, arguing that it was simply too easy to focus exclusively on the accounts offered by the more powerful and privileged elements in society and to use them as a basis for the construction of theory.

Unbalanced and uncritical workplace studies, or simply management-speak turned into actuality, have amalgamated with the interests of business leaders and right-wing political perspectives, and this is the background to the emergence of the 'mythical' picture of work in contemporary society. These myths are 'at work' in two ways. Firstly, they are widely held beliefs about work that many feel cannot be challenged, but equally cannot be substantiated. Secondly, these myths are active components that influence future developments in organisations and government policies. In *Myths at Work* we have selected and challenged what we consider to be the most influential of these myths, but we recognise that we could have included even more. Those that we challenge and which need to be confronted in academia, careers guidance and training policy formation, include:

- the so-called 'death of class', where the working class and the unemployed appear to be less vocal, less dissatisfied and less worthy of study;
- the myth of the female take-over of the workplace, which portrays women workers as successful, achieving equality and replacing men;
- the myth that trade unions are now superfluous due to the achievement of harmonious workplace relations and an end to industrial conflict;
- the myth that non-standard work and employment flexibility is a good option for all workers, allowing greater choice and more freedom;
- the myth that UK training strategies support young and re-training workers and prepare them for jobs in the 'knowledge economy';
- the myth that technology and science can solve all workplace-related problems and provide suitable solutions to businesses facing crises;
- the myth that the world of work has been changed beyond recognition by external forces of globalisation that are wholly beyond our control.

All of these myths need to be challenged if we are to be able to offer an account of what work actually is today, and what it actually means to people involved in it. Unless we do challenge these myths, we will continue to perpetuate a situation where we, as groups of academics, practitioners or individuals, are inhibited by a lack of clear knowledge of what we are actually trying to focus on. We need to start from a level position that does not blithely accept the status quo.

#### The need to hear the voices of all those involved in work

In *Myths at Work*, we challenge the myths by drawing on our own case-study evidence and that gathered by others. We argue that it is vitally

important to hear the voices of *all* of those involved in work, not just the most influential. We also argue that we need to present *critical* accounts of what work has been and what it is now, rather than the normative accounts that we find prevalent today. From our research, and from the case studies of others, we would specifically challenge the key ideas about contemporary work in the following ways:

- Globalisation is an important factor in contemporary society, but it is neither new nor omnipotent. Too often employers will use globalisation as an unspecified factor that can be used as a stick to beat workers with. In addition, globalisation becomes an excuse for a lack of government intervention in both the public and private sectors. Effectively, we feel that globalisation is used as a smokescreen to pass risk from employers to employees.
- This clearly informs issues of flexibility and lean production, the two myths that have wrought the most overt changes in workplaces. Yet there is little or no evidence that lean production is a superior form of production, and our research would suggest that flexibility has serious negative consequences for workers who are forced to be flexible, as opposed to those who choose 'portfolio working'.
- Feminisation of work – the replacement of male workers by female workers – is claimed to have adverse consequences for men, but is also claimed to be inevitable. Stories about boys' relatively poor performance in schools and men's labour market disadvantage are common in the media, while politicians and educationalists are already devising policies to set things right. In reality, women continue to face enormous disadvantages in employment, not least because their role as unpaid domestic workers in the home, particularly for married women and mothers, remains unchanged.

- Class is still a major issue, and our research shows class to be the most significant factor in deciding employment outcomes and attitudes towards work. It is also the major social division in workplaces and a key determinant of the ways in which conflict in workplaces will emerge.
- We cannot deny that industrial disputes have declined in recent years. But it is simply foolish to claim that this means that we now work in harmonious workplaces. Much of our research points to continued and continuous resistance to, for example, rationalisation and endless change in particular workplaces. Again, we return to our main point that we need to listen to *all* voices involved in work to get a true picture of what is happening on the ground.
- Youth training policy is trumpeted as a major success by the current government, and on paper it certainly has achieved impressive successes. However, we have to ask the question, 'What jobs are we training people for?'. The perception that we have either entered or are on the brink of a 'knowledge' or 'information' society has become increasingly commonplace within managerialist accounts of workplace change, government public policy rhetoric and some academic texts. These are not new, and we have yet to see these jobs emerge.
- The idea that science and technology will 'rescue' failing companies or 'cure' workplace problems is also not a new one, but is so deeply entrenched in management 'science' that it has become the default option for change. Yet we can see that trying to use science and technology to solve social issues in workplaces will simply produce more problems.

### Key themes

The challenges to the dominant myths about work which were made at the conference in October and in *Myths at Work* are contentious. However, our primary argument is that we must challenge these myths at the outset of any research or analysis of what work is, and we must actually look at workplaces and employment rather than simply assimilating accounts from other, often partisan, witnesses. At the day conference, two final key themes emerged:

- How can academics influence policy and decision making?
- How can academics feed something back into the workplaces and the people who make work possible?

In order to develop an accurate picture of work, there is a need for academics to build links with those who can help to develop an accurate picture of the problems facing workers. That includes practitioners at the interface of work and training who also wish to see beyond the myths at work.

### Notes

One of the practical suggestions that emerged from the conference was the development of a website, which could carry information, and articles, which would be of value to academics, practitioners, trade unionists, etc. If you are interested in this development, please contact [mark@bss1.bham.ac.uk](mailto:mark@bss1.bham.ac.uk)

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## The Role of Group Work in Careers Education and Guidance Programmes

Ruth Higgins & Jane Westergaard

The Careers Service Annual Report 1997/98 identified group work as an area of CEG practice requiring development:

'Group work is recognised as an important part of a careers education programme. Recent research has shown, however, that it is not always efficiently integrated into the overall programme of careers education and guidance, and its objectives are not always clear to careers advisers or careers co-ordinators' (DfEE, 1998).

These observations reveal that, despite its perceived value, group work continues to be an ill-defined and often poorly managed activity within CEG programmes. Our own experience as trainers and educators of CEG practitioners leads us to believe that the effective integration of group work into such programmes will continue to be 'patchy' unless two fundamental questions are addressed:

- What is 'group work' or what could it be?
- How can group work enhance CEG programmes?

In this article, we will offer some answers to these questions by drawing together elements of guidance theory and learning theory, and so attempt to create a clear concept of, and vocabulary for, group work practice.

### What is 'group work'?

The term 'group work' tends to be applied to a wide spectrum of group activity within CEG programmes – for example:

- Small groups formed within a class setting engaged in discrete activities which are then fed back into a larger group discussion.
- Information-giving sessions on specific topics.
- 'Fun' sessions – self-consciously different from 'lessons' and characterised by the use of 'games' which define the experience in contrast to formal 'learning'.

There is nothing wrong in principle with any of these approaches but why are they all defined as group work? It seems that the term is applied to any activity that deviates from the 'norm' of group learning experiences, i.e. lessons or lectures. It appears to have no greater meaning and this, in our view, has led to a lack of coherence and effectiveness.

There is a need to create conceptual clarity as a starting point to developing group work practice. So, if group work is an 'important part of a careers education programme' (DfEE, 1998), why and how is it important? What makes it a distinct activity in terms of aims, objectives, content and methods?

### What could 'group work' be?

Our view is that group work within CEG programmes could and should be defined as a guidance activity; in style, content and aims, more similar to the one-to-one guidance interview than is currently the case.

Guidance group work would thereby have the following defining characteristics:

- The focus of the sessions would be on issues not merely on topics. This means that the planning and delivery of group work would be centred on key underlying questions, concerns and considerations in relation to any given topic.
- Sessions would include the opportunity for individual reflection on these issues.
- Sessions would be action-focused.

Although guidance group work can be similar to the one-to-one guidance interaction, it cannot be the same, or achieve identical outcomes, not least because the issues addressed during a group session are partly pre-determined by the facilitator in the planning stage. Of course, the key difference is the additional resource of the group itself, and it is this fusion of the group process and the guidance process which characterises our approach to guidance group work:

'This capacity concurrently to draw upon group processes, but to focus on personal experience, appears to be a key feature of successful group work' (Law, 1996).

Law conceptualises guidance group work in the terms we have described, but he does not explore in any more detail the function and form of group work specifically. So, how can credible, theoretically-based models for guidance group work be created if they do not already exist?

Searching within allied fields of research would seem to be an obvious starting point. Indeed, an examination of group theory, including Bion's work on group assumptions (Bion, 1948/51), and Hopson & Scally's work on approaches to careers education (Hopson & Scally, 1981), reveals perspectives which can usefully inform group work models. However, the context assumed in such fields of practice is quite different from that of guidance and therefore applicability is limited. For example, Bion's work on group assumptions relates to the dynamic of a group in a therapeutic context as it develops over a period of time, which, although it may be relevant to group work practice, does not provide the 'whole story'. Similar limitations are evident in writing on careers education which tends to be either curriculum-focused (e.g. 'How to' develop a CEG curriculum) or resource-oriented (e.g. 'How to' run a good lesson). Neither source offers the conceptual or theoretical framework to inform models for guidance group work.

However, two areas of research do provide directly relevant theoretical perspectives for the development of guidance group work. These areas are guidance theory and learning theory.

### Guidance theory

An exploration of the theories underpinning guidance practice reveals that a variety of approaches are

adopted by guidance practitioners. Jenny Kidd (1996) usefully categorises these into four key 'orientations' ('person-environment fit', 'developmental', 'person-centred' and 'goal-directed'). Each of these orientations will take practitioners and, therefore, their clients in particular directions and, presumably, to different conclusions and outcomes.

Although wary of judging any one of these orientations as 'better' than the others (appropriateness, of course, being dependent on a range of factors such as context, client need, effectiveness of practitioner), it seems that the goal-directed orientation (adapted from Egan's helping model and featuring in most guidance training courses in the UK), is most complementary to guidance in a group context. Key characteristics of the goal-directed approach make it relevant:

- The focus is on the needs and issues of the client.
- The guidance practitioner is a 'helper' who does not have the 'right answers' for the client, but who is skilled in assisting the client to find the right answers for themselves.
- It emphasises the need for action, for clients to transpose the learning undertaken and conclusions reached to the reality of their lives outside the session.

Of course, neither Egan's original model nor Kidd's analysis of guidance practice assumes a group context, but application is possible – and worthwhile. For example, the three defining characteristics of goal-directed guidance, described above, could be adapted in the following ways:

- The needs of the group are anticipated when planning a session by designing activities which will enable group members to explore relevant issues; but the session will begin with group and facilitator agreeing an agenda so that adjustments can be made in line with the specific needs and experience of the group. This establishes from the start a client-centred approach, such that group members are fully involved participants in the process, aware of the objectives of the session and understanding its value and relevance to them.
- The facilitator will use guidance skills to create opportunities throughout the session for individuals to learn, focus and reflect on relevant issues. The group will be its own resource in this process, but the facilitator has a co-ordinating role, i.e. summarising key learning points as they emerge, sharing information to develop the work of the group, challenging the group by offering different perspectives.
- The facilitator will create opportunities for the learning achieved and the conclusions reached during the session to be applied to each individual. Group members will leave the session with specific ideas concerning the action they will take as a consequence of the group experience.

It is possible, therefore, to plan and deliver group work with the aim of meeting goal-directed guidance outcomes. In order for those outcomes to be achieved, however, approaches to learning which best accommodate a guidance process must also be adopted.

### Learning theory

Approaches to learning which use the experiences, needs, values and beliefs of individuals within a group as a central resource, are those most conducive to the type of 'learning' characteristic of effective guidance. Several such models exist

and are worthy of review in this context, e.g. the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), the principles of student-centred learning (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986), the constructivist theory of learning (Peavy, 1998). All promote philosophies and methods to facilitate growth and understanding of the individual.

In particular, theories of adult learning provide a complementary and practical framework for managing the distinct 'learning' process of guidance in a group context. 'Andragogy' (Knowles, 1993) defines itself in contrast to traditional pedagogical methods and is premised on some key assumptions about adults as learners:

- That they are self-directed rather than dependent in their learning style.
- That adults will and should use life experience as a central resource for learning.
- That adults are motivated by the immediate application of learning – problem-centred rather than subject-centred.

Relevance to the group context is clear: learning in andragogical terms both draws on and informs the realities of an individual's life in all its aspects – social, political and economic. The concept of problem-centred rather than subject-centred learning relates directly to the 'issues' which drive the guidance process. In addition, the focus on immediate application of learning supports the action-oriented dynamic of goal-directed guidance.

Approaches that have been developed to create a very different learning experience to traditional models, seem to provide a framework which best accommodates the goal-directed guidance process. Perhaps this should come as no surprise. After all, the guidance process does equate to a unique learning experience and one that is relevant to younger people as well as adults.

### How can guidance group work enhance CEG programmes?

In general terms, the approach to guidance group work described above would, we believe, create greater congruence between the aims and methods of CEG programmes. If the overall aim of a CEG programme is for individuals to develop self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision-making skills and transition skills (Law & Watts, 1977), then using guidance group work methods would help those individuals to 'sense', 'sift', 'focus' and 'understand' – the skills which Law believes are necessary to achieve the overall aim (Law, 1999).

Law's recent writing on careers work illustrates the need to do more than identify what a CEG programme should aim for, but also to consider how those aims can be achieved. Guidance group work could form an important part of the how – complementary to other aspects of the CEG curriculum, but to be used selectively, taking into account the following considerations:

- **The group.** As described above, guidance group work methods are participative, give group members considerable autonomy and require them to be reflective. Some groups and individuals may not be able or are not willing to cope with this approach, so preparation for learning in this way, coupled with skilled facilitation to support group members through the process, are important factors.
- **The context.** As a guidance activity, group work is most appropriately delivered at points of, or in preparation for, transition, change and decision-making, i.e. at times when guidance in other forms is considered to be useful.
- **The facilitator.** This approach requires a facilitator who is cognisant of the underpinning theories and outcomes that can be achieved. S/he will need to have developed a range of skills applicable to working within a guidance context. Whether this individual is a teacher, careers adviser, personal adviser or in some other role, matters less than their understanding of, and skills in, guidance group-work facilitation.

Overall, successful integration of this approach within CEG programmes requires there to be a shared vocabulary between all 'stakeholders' so that group members, facilitators and curriculum managers have a common understanding of the defining characteristics of guidance group work, what is involved, and why it is worthwhile.

### Conclusion

Our assertion that there is a place within CEG programmes for guidance-oriented group activity is not intended to negate or replace any of the well-established elements which are traditionally included. Rather, it fits with the current focus on methods for delivering effective CEG curricula and proposes that the divide between education and guidance activities need be neither rigid nor vast.

In these times of the 'differentiated' core curriculum, is there not an argument for the same approach to the delivery of CEG programmes? The introduction of learning mentors in schools and the advent of the personal adviser role suggests the need for CEG programmes and services in and beyond compulsory education which are more responsive to individual needs. The provision of extra guidance group work sessions which address the needs of individuals who are 'in need' or 'at risk' is one way that this approach could be integrated into and enhance existing CEG programmes.

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## Reconceiving Guidance and Counselling: Using Information in the Information Age

W. Norton Grubb

Several different educational problems have been redressed by providing information to students. One such programme – the central issue of this paper – is career-oriented guidance and counselling, intended to help students choose an occupational path and an associated educational path; others include sex education, tobacco prevention, drug education, parenting education, and various other forms of ‘life skills’ education. More generally, market-like mechanisms such as vouchers and school choice rely on parents and students being rational, self-interested ‘consumers’, and information is one way of making these markets work.

Those who have promoted information have usually assumed that information can be acted upon – that it is sufficient to make decisions that are considered rational. However, this assumption is surely invalid in general, and it may be especially invalid for students (or parents) who are unpractised or unsophisticated in using information – including low-income students and minority students, who often seem to make decisions that are not in their own best interests. This paper therefore poses the question of what preconditions are necessary for individuals to use information in their own self-interest. In the ‘information age’, this becomes a particularly critical question because our culture is awash in information for those who can seek

it out – but, conversely, no amount of information will be sufficient for those who cannot absorb it.

The overall conception of information in a variety of educational programmes is simplistic and inadequate, e.g.:

- secondary schools where resources for guidance and counselling have been dwindling.
- community colleges where many students enroll without clear plans.
- four-year colleges with ‘student development’.
- short-term job training programmes where guidance and counselling have typically been missing.
- welfare-to-work programmes where the ‘caseworker function’ represents a distinctive approach to guidance and counselling.
- ‘youth development’ programmes.

While approaches in these different (and non-communicating) programmes vary, they tend to rely on the provision of information – rather than helping individuals with the task of using information. This is particularly evident in the one-stop centres being funded by the Department of Labor to provide individuals with information about post-secondary education and training options.

### Conditions before information can be used

So what are the necessary preconditions in order for individuals to use information well? From examining the various literatures about decision-making, there is only one normative model of ‘rational’ decisions: the expected utility model of economics. However, this model – and its translation by other disciplines such as psychology – requires at least seven

conditions before information can be used ‘rationally’, three of them related to the capacity to understand information, and four of them related to requirements of the rational decision-making model:

1. **The authority of information.** Information which is not considered authoritative will not be considered, and the authority of information varies from group to group – a special problem in dealing with diverse groups with their own norms including teenagers, minority communities, ethnic communities including recent immigrants, and sometimes rural communities.
2. **‘Oral’ and ‘literate’ approaches to information.** The information provided in guidance and counselling, and various other educational programmes, often comes in written form – reference books, government publications, research reports, and computer-based versions of these. As Walter Ong (1982) and others have emphasised, however, many individuals and groups do not fully accept such ‘literate’ sources; in a more ‘oral’ tradition, the authority of the individual conveying the information is more important. This issue is especially important in the ‘information age’, where information is often available only in written form.
3. **The construction of information.** Particularly in an ‘information age’, individuals are surrounded by information in many forms, but they don’t necessarily absorb it unless they have the constructs or schema necessary for absorbing and cataloguing the information. This means that the information necessary for ‘rational’ decisions is

not exogenous to the decision – it is instead endogenous, collected as part of the decision-making process. Therefore information may not be ‘created’ or absorbed until individuals have reasons to do so, which in turn depends on their preferences.

4. **The existence of well-formed preferences.** All economic and psychological theories of decision-making assume that individuals have preferences – or interests, or needs, or ‘self-concepts’. But the development of these preferences are nowhere examined, and without them individuals cannot make decisions that can be considered rational in the conventional sense – and they may not be able to construct information from the flows available to them.
5. **Time perspective and planfulness.** Because career-related decisions require actions in the present taken on behalf of events in the future, they require the ability to deal with time in a meaningful way. (In economists’ terms, preferences include a rate of time preference.) But there has been little investigation of how and whether individuals come to develop the facility.
6. **Probabilistic thinking.** Because future events are often probabilistic, individuals making decisions need to be able to weigh alternatives with different probabilities. (Again, the economists’ expected utility model explicitly incorporates stochastic thinking, in the form of expected outcomes and risk preferences.) There is a considerable literature from psychology about the inability of individuals to behave consistently under different descriptions of probabilities, but there is little information about how individuals develop stochastic thinking.
7. **‘Empathy’ or counter-factual thinking.** The conventional conceptions of ‘rational’ decision-making requires individuals to

consider several alternatives, including some which have not been experienced or which will not be chosen. This requires the ability to imagine the consequences for the individual of counter-factual events. The inability to do so means that they are unable to consider a wide enough array of options – something that happens when, for example, young women fail to consider stereotypically ‘male’ occupations, or when students with parents who have not gone to college fail to consider college-going seriously.

### Conclusions

This conceptualisation of how to use information leads in several directions. Firstly, while it does not dispute the need for information, it recognises that information may be necessary but not sufficient. It leads to a large agenda investigating how young people make decisions – in particular, investigating under what conditions young people have problems with these seven elements.

Secondly, this conceptualisation clarifies that certain ways of thinking – for example, the ability to evaluate impersonal information available in ‘literate’ forms, and stochastic and counter-factual thinking – are crucial not only in the disciplines (like maths and English) but are also critically related to decision-making. The current interest in constructivist teaching is not only a powerful way of teaching conventional academic subjects, but is also a way of preparing students in certain ‘life skills’ which are crucial to their futures.

Thirdly, this approach clarifies that, when schools engage in preparing students to choose careers (or make other crucial decisions, like those related to sex and drugs), their activities could range well beyond the provision of information. While it is not clear, for example, how preferences (including time preferences) are generated, an obvious answer is that they come from the experiences of individuals – and anything schools do to enrich these experiences may be helpful. The incorporation of work-based learning and service learning into schools, the greater use of project-based approaches, and the development of various themes around which instruction is focused are all ways that schools can expand students’ range of experiences – particularly students from low-income and minority backgrounds, or girls and boys who have not been exposed to non-traditional occupations. But merely providing experiences without the effort to extract their meaning for students’ own lives is inadequate, so this direction also calls for integrating such experiences more closely into the rest of the curriculum.

This paper is of course a conceptual or theoretical treatment of decision-making in an ‘information age’, rather than an empirical investigation of decision-making, and much more empirical research is needed to develop its implications. It is intended to direct thinking about a large class of issues in new ways, to recognise the inadequacy of simply providing information as a solution to complex problems.

### Note

This outline for a paper is based on a NICEC seminar held in London.

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## Changing Careers - a Central London Graduate Perspective

Mike Fenton

The central London economy is going through rapid change. The impact of globalisation and new technology has led to a dramatic shift in the structure of the economy and in the type of skills required of the workforce. The emphasis now is on knowledge-rich workers who can assist the dynamic growth of companies serving an international market place. Some simple statistics related to the central London economy highlight these changes:

- **The enormous increase in jobs in the business services sector.** Between 1991 and 1998 there was a 51% increase in jobs in this sector as compared to an increase of only 7% in all other sectors.
- **The increasing penetration of foreign-owned companies.** By summer 2000, over a third of companies with over 200 employees were non-UK owned. In the finance sector, 60% of businesses with over 200 employees had foreign ownership.
- **The high rate of organisational change in large and foreign-owned companies.** A third of companies with over 200 employees and a similar proportion of all foreign-owned companies had experienced a merger, take-over or major reorganisation in the previous year.
- **The increasing graduate nature of the workforce.** A half of employees in the central London area now have qualifications at NVQ level 4 or 5.

On the basis that these trends are set to continue, there are important implications for the methods used by employers to recruit and for the ways that graduates seek to obtain employment.

### Recruitment in central London

The central London area is characterised by the high use of recruitment agencies. One-in-four jobs in private sector companies are filled through recruitment agencies. In professional occupations, perhaps unsurprisingly, this rises to 40%. However, the use of recruitment agencies is spreading to other occupations: for example, a similar proportion of clerical and secretarial jobs is now filled in this way.

The other major way that jobs are found is through word of mouth. Together the methods of using recruitment agencies and word of mouth account for about a half of all filled jobs. This has major implications for the ways that graduates should go about finding work. Job search has to be highly pro-active and needs to reach the parts and places where people, not in work, do not normally go.

### A highly competitive market place

People applying for jobs need to understand that they are in a very competitive market. In a recent study of 2,000 advertised jobs, the average number of applicants per job was 28. Those who are looking to enter the workforce for the first time and those who are unemployed are competing not just against other unemployed people but against a large number who are already in employment but want a change of job. Clearly, it is no longer enough to be able to meet the minimum criteria for a job. To secure employment, candidates need to be able to demonstrate that they are the *best* person for the job.

It is also important to realise that most employers do not use particularly sophisticated recruitment tools. Only 4% use psychometric tests. Reliance is still placed on the face-to-face interview. This is not necessarily a one-off event – almost a half of employers took the process to a second or third stage interview. Clerical, sales and personal and protective service vacancies are just as likely to involve multiple interviews as are professional jobs.

To be the chosen person, candidates need to be able to impress a prospective employer (as well as a recruitment agency) and to show commitment through what may be a long-winded process.

### What do employers want?

Employers are looking for a mixture of qualifications, experience and soft skills. There are changes taking place with regard to each of these factors.

#### • Qualifications

With regard to qualifications, an interesting dichotomy emerges. When

people in work are asked how important they feel their qualifications were in helping them to get their job, two-thirds say that it was of high or medium importance. When employers are asked how important they think qualifications are when they are recruiting, two-thirds say that a qualification is *not* essential. How can we square these seemingly differing views? The solution is that qualifications are a pre-requisite to being shortlisted. When employers are faced with tens or hundreds of applications, they need a quick way of deciding whom to reject. Often, and in particular for younger recruits, this will be done on the basis of qualifications. However, the decision as to who to employ from the final line-up will be done by looking at the candidates as a whole. Qualifications are a necessary but not a sufficient condition to getting a job.

Even at degree level, qualifications provide differing signals to employers. In a study we carried out looking at graduates in the London labour market, we identified a big difference between professions where there is a traditional route to a job, such as pharmacy, architecture, etc., and emergent professions such as computing and marketing where a body of subject knowledge and specific skills are required, as against those occupations where employers just want a person of graduate calibre. Interestingly, two-thirds of employers who recruited new graduates said that they did so without reference to the subject that the person had studied.

• **Experience**

Employers are generally looking for high levels of experience. This mainly relates to experience in using the required skills, but for some occupations – for example, craft occupations, social welfare jobs – it also means having appropriate sector experience. Even when employers are looking to recruit new graduates, they still expected a level of work experience. A quarter said that it was almost a condition of employment, with a further half saying it would be viewed

favourably. There are clearly issues as to how young graduates can be expected to get appropriate work experience.

• **Skills**

The final element in the jigsaw concerns the acquisition and demonstration of soft skills. Employers are now expecting prospective employees to have a wide range of these skills, including many of the so-called, key skills such as communication and team-working, as well as many other attributes such as motivation and flexibility. Our research has shown though that employers are often unclear as to what they mean by these skills and that there are differences by occupation.

The table below shows the different emphases provided by employers when defining two of the key skills – oral communication and team working. Oral communication is more likely to be defined as a pro-active talking skill for managers, whilst for sales occupations it will have a greater emphasis on customer liaison. Team-working involves inter-personal skills amongst associate professional occupations, whilst in many professional jobs it is less people-orientated and more related to working on shared projects. For plant and machinery operatives, team-working means getting on and getting things done rather than talking about it!

**Definitions of oral communication skills**

Definition	Occupation with highest rating of definition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take part in one-to-one discussions</li> <li>• Communicate with customers</li> <li>• Good telephone manner</li> <li>• Listen effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers</li> <li>• Sales</li> <li>• Clerical and secretarial</li> <li>• Personal and protective</li> </ul>

**Definitions of team working**

Definition	Occupation with highest rating of definition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to get on with other members of the team</li> <li>• Ability to work on shared projects</li> <li>• Ability to lead and manage people</li> <li>• Take responsibility for getting things done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate professional</li> <li>• Professional</li> <li>• Managers</li> <li>• Plant and machinery operatives</li> </ul>

The graduate labour market study also showed that there is a difference in perspective between the views of graduates and employers. The table below shows the skills which graduates believed that they held to a very high level. It also shows those skills which employers believe are lacking in recent graduates. Communication skills appear in both lists!

Skills Held (Graduate views)	Skills Lacking (Employer Views)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working on own</li> <li>• Team-working</li> <li>• Oral communication</li> <li>• Written communication</li> <li>• Problem-solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speed/sense of urgency</li> <li>• Communication skills</li> <li>• Business sense</li> <li>• IT skills</li> </ul>

Only a minority of graduates identified that they held entrepreneurial skills to a high level. Interestingly, they were far more likely to be earning higher salaries.

Job applicants need to be equipped with the wide range of the skills we have listed, but they also need to be shown how they can demonstrate to employers that they possess these skills. Applicants should be aware that employers in different sectors and recruiting to particular occupations will have varying views of the generic skills they require. We have recently commissioned the production of a multimedia "Improving Employability" pack which aims to assist students and trainees to improve the quality and relevance of job applications and to be better prepared for job interviews. The pack is now being successfully used by further education colleges and training providers in the central London area.

### Graduate outcomes

Having a degree is clearly of major assistance in getting a job. In Inner London, 4% of those with a degree who are economically active are unemployed. This percentage rises to 10% for those with just A-levels and to 19% for those with no qualifications.

However, graduates from black and ethnic-minority groups find it much harder to obtain employment. Our study of recent graduates showed that the unemployment rate for Asian graduates was 12% and for Black graduates was 17% as compared to the rate for white graduates of 5%. In addition, a lower proportion of Black and Asian graduates were currently in jobs that were the sort of work they wanted. The difference in employment rates by ethnic group become more pronounced the lower the level of degree obtained by the graduates.

Just over three-quarters of recent graduates were using skills they had acquired on their degree in their present jobs. The higher the level of degree, the more likely that their skills are being utilised. However, 40% of graduates say that they are over-

qualified for the type of work that they are doing and a half of graduates say that non-graduates are performing similar jobs to themselves. Given that these respondents had, in the main, graduated two to three years previously, this suggests a relatively high level of job mis-match and under-utilisation of graduate skills.

### Graduate readiness

There are a number of implications which flow from this analysis. The first concerns the integration of generic skills into the curriculum. A degree on its own is no longer sufficient, in particular for the majority of students not studying for traditional professional jobs. A number of universities are taking the lead in embedding generic skills into the curriculum and this is a trend which is likely to continue.

Secondly, work-experience placements can assist graduates to demonstrate that they have a level of appropriate experience when they apply for jobs. This is thought to be particularly important for those following science courses. Interestingly, over 80% of employers who recruit graduates do not have any formal link with a university. Clearly, this is a resource which could be better tapped.

The need for improved careers advice was identified by the graduates. Only 25% rated the careers advice they received at university as good and a half said that they received no advice at all on careers following graduation. Even fewer feel that they received good advice on jobs in the London area. Additional support is required for all, but particularly for black and other ethnic-minority students, who presently face additional barriers in accessing appropriate jobs.

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