NICEC
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

Published in partnership with the CDI

Online: ISSN 2059-4879

JOURNAL OF THE National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

October 2024 | Issue 53

Promoting research and reflective practice in career development

NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

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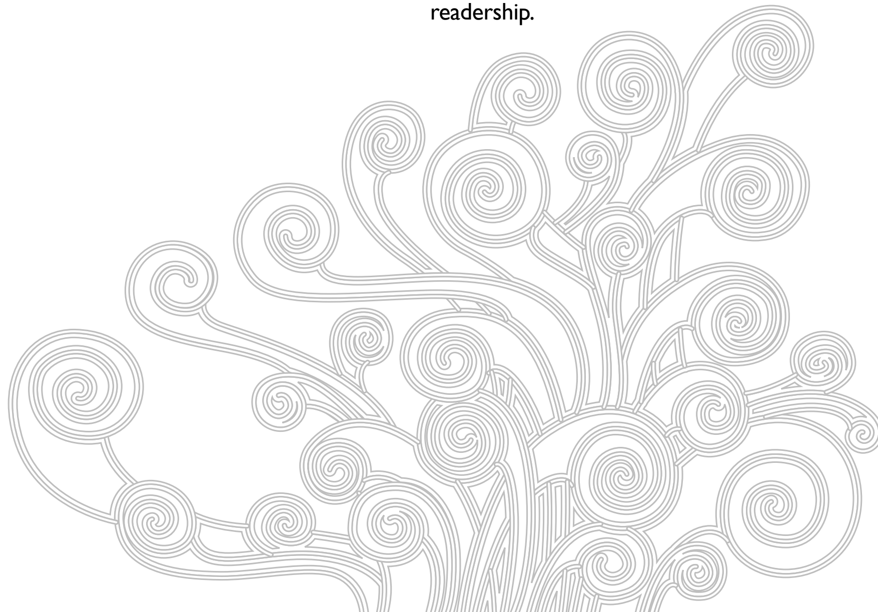

Designed & typeset by J. G. Wilkinson.

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JOURNAL OF THE
National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

October 2024, Issue 53

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PUBLISHER

The *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* is published in partnership with the CDI by: National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC), The Lodge, Cheerbrook Road, Willaston, Nantwich CW5 7EN.

www.nicec.org

Career and sustainability

Editorial

10.20856/jnicec.5301

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To cite this article:

Hooley, T. (2024). Career and sustainability. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 3-7. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5301

Introduction

At the start of July 2024, the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) held its first conference, and indeed its first face-to-face meeting of any kind, since the pandemic. We have now been living in the 'new normal' for a few years, and while face-to-face interactions have clearly re-emerged, they are undoubtedly less frequent that before Covid. Given this, I cannot have been alone in looking forward to the opportunity to get together with friends, colleagues and a wide range of new people at the conference.

In fact, the conference exceeded my anticipation, as not only did it bring together the NICEC community, but it also presented an opportunity for new and innovative thinking. The conference was advertised as addressing 'career and sustainability' with sustainability being defined primarily through three concepts: skills; wellbeing and the environment. Inevitably these three concepts intertwined in a variety of interesting ways across the two days of the conference.

The concepts that were addressed in the conference broke new ground, with participants whispering to each other that 'we might be onto something new here' and some anxiety as we interrogated seemingly untouchable concepts around 'impartiality', 'client centredness' and the need to be politically neutral. Asking difficult questions and wrangling with definitions is one of NICEC's specialities, but on this occasion, we went all out.

By the end of the conference, it was clear that there was much more to do. The tentative plan to create a special issue of the journal, inspired by the conference was strongly endorsed with the conference organisers, presenters and participants all highlighting things that they wanted included. Less than six months later, we are in a position to present this special issue to you and ask you, whether you were at the conference or not, to engage with these debates around sustainability.

Within this issue you will find a wide range of perspectives and even some outright disagreements and contradictions. We hope to stimulate thinking and debate about what sustainability is and what it means for the career development field. You may not agree with everything that you find in here, but hopefully it will challenge you to think differently. If you are outraged by what you read, why not write a response for the next issue, there is a call for papers at the end of this issue.

Defining sustainability

At the conference we drew on the University of California's definition which describes sustainability as 'the integration of social equity, economic vitality and environmental health and well-being in order to create thriving healthy, diverse and resilient communities now and in the future' (UCLA, 2016). We then identified the themes of skills, wellbeing, and the environment to focus discussions and create a structure for the conference. However, for the purpose of the journal, it is important to dig a little deeper in our consideration of what we mean by sustainability.

'Sustainability' is a contested term which various authors, policymakers and actors seek to define and, often, claim for their own (Brown, 2016). It is variously used to describe sustainable careers (as discussed by Ans De Vos in her article in this issue), sustainable guidance (Šapale et al., 2021) and many other concepts both within and beyond our field. Sustainability literally means 'the quality of being able to continue over a period of time' and this concept can be applied to *individuals and their careers*, where it might be used as the opposite of burnout, to *communities and societies*, where it might address the need to build fair, equitable and just societies which will not collapse into internal conflict, and perhaps most commonly to *ecosystems* where it is used to recognise the finite and fragile nature of such systems and the need for careful stewardship.

Perhaps the most famous definition of 'sustainability' is that offered by the United Nations' *Brundtland Commission* (1987) which defined sustainability as follows.

> Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (p.16)

Such a definition connects the recognition of the need for environmental justice with a desire for social justice. The adoption of such a concept into the theoretical lexicon on career guidance throws us a range of challenges for guidance practices which has often centred the individual and given limited space to social, environmental and multi-generational framings to career decision making and management.

The Brundtland definition has been built on in the UN's (2017) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), perhaps our most influential contemporary articulation of sustainability. The SDG's version of sustainability, as with much of the work on sustainable careers, adopts a broad definition of sustainability which extends beyond environmental sustainability to include other normative values of social justice and human wellbeing such as decent work, clean water and a functioning social infrastructure. The SDGs have in turn influenced the development of thinking in career guidance (Nota et al., 2020; Robertson, 2021) and this work is continued in the current collection particularly in the articles by Candy Ho and Eileen Cunningham and colleagues.

Collectively the papers in this issue make the argument that careers should firstly be sustainable, secondly that they should contribute to wider aims for social and environmental sustainability, and thirdly that purposeful interventions with people (career guidance) can help them to achieve both greater sustainability in their own career and contribute to wider forms of sustainability. At the heart of this is the need to challenge accelerationist narratives around career which focus on money and hierarchical progression and refocus towards broader, more inclusive approaches to careering which emphasise personal well-being, the development of a more holistic conception of the good life which includes paid work, but also recognises the breadth of people's life worlds, and social and environmental connection.

The challenge thrown down to the careers field by this issue of the journal is substantial. In a world where the planet is burning, business as usual is not possible. But, determining what this means for policy and practice within our field of careers remains challenging. I hope that the papers in this issue stimulate thinking and experimentation and point the way forwards for new types of sustainable careering and career guidance.

About the issue

One of the unique features of the NICEC journal is its ability to draw together different kinds of contributions from a wide range of different participants. We have contributions from the UK, the Netherlands, the Czech and Slovak republics and Canada and from a mix of academics, researchers, practitioners, consultants and sector leaders. Furthermore, we have contributions which offer theoretical arguments, which present empirical data, which offer models and activities for practice and which state, at times, challenging arguments. The diversity of the journal is its strength and again we would encourage all readers to consider whether they would like to contribute to the journal further in the future.

The issue begins with a contribution from **Ans De Vos**, who provided the keynote for the conference and remains as one of the leading thinkers on sustainability in career. Her article argues that in an uncertain world we can no longer think about career as linear sequence of predictable work experiences that one has full control over. Instead we need to develop new forms of sustainable career theory that recognises the new context that we are in and provides tools for career counsellors. The argument that we need new theories and concepts is picked up by **Cathy Brown** who draws on Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance to set out a new vision for what sustainability could be in the context of career.

In the next article we move from theory to practice, as **Candy Ho** sets out the way that she as worked with the UK SDGs in practice to develop a careers education programme in Canadian higher education. **Eileen Cunningham and colleagues** present similar ideas and approaches to practice in their article. This time they focus on the concept of Decent Work and use this to underpin the development of a critical careers education programme in UK higher education.

In her article **Laura Walker** picks up many of the themes that have emerged so far but with particular reference to the careers of women in mid-life. Is meaningful, and sustainable work, even a possibility for such women she asks, noting the interplay between gender, work quality, health and wellbeing and individual subjectivity. While **Kate**

Mansfield offers practical ideas for careers professionals to more successfully integrate discussion of wellbeing into practice.

The final three papers turn attention to environmental sustainability and what is sometimes referred to as 'green guidance' (Plant, 2020). **Eva Kavková and Tomáš Šprlák** engage with the ethical dilemmas of connecting career guidance to politicised areas such as climate change. They highlight the tensions in existing frameworks and make the argument that all too often attachment to impartiality and neutrality has crowded out other ethical imperatives around acting in the best interest of the client and supporting social justice. **Korin Grant** picks these issues up in her article which sets out a facilitated process designed to support practitioners to collectively reflect on their current practice, acknowledge existing positions, discuss concerns and imagine new, 'greener' practices. Finally, **Belinda Nuttall**, the winner of the Bill Law award, for outstanding new research by a student, draws on her research with careers practitioners and their attitudes towards green guidance to propose a new framework for green career education and guidance.

In conclusion

This issue shows that the concept of sustainability can be highly enriching for career studies and career guidance. It is, of course, not without its challenges and controversies, but the importance of sustainability as a concept is unlikely to wane. As governments push towards net zero, as the mental health crisis increases in prominence and as employers and workers negotiate over precarity and decent work, the role for career guidance is only going to increase. We hope that this issue provides some insights that can help the field to engage with these ideas and successfully develop new forms of theory and practice in response to them.

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Article

10.20856/jnicec.5302

Enhancing the sustainability of careers in disruptive times

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To cite this article:

De Vos, A. (2024). Enhancing the sustainability of careers in disruptive times. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 8-17. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5302

Abstract

Our current world is putting to the test the resilience of many workers when dealing with uncertainty and adjusting to changing ways of working, rapid digitisation, combined with a pressure to perform and stay employable. In these uncertain times, it has become even more clear that careers cannot be seen as a linear sequence of predictable work experiences that one has full control over, and that individuals cannot just rely on others to take care of their career security. At the same time, it provokes questions regarding the role of different stakeholders involved. Moreover, it becomes important to broaden the view of sustainable careers to encompass not only how individuals' careers are affected by a changing context, but also how individual career choices affect this context and hence can contribute to enhancing sustainability in a broader sense. This article summarises the key elements of sustainable careers theory and discusses the relevance of this framework for understanding and addressing contemporary career challenges and implications for career counselling. It is a summary of my keynote address at the NICEC conference in Birmingham, July 2024.

Keywords: sustainable careers; time; social space; agency and meaning

Introduction

A career comes down to the pattern of work-related experiences that a person accumulates throughout their professional life (Arthur et al., 1989). It is a complex mosaic of objective situations and events, along with the subjective evaluations people make of them. In other words, it's about the accumulation of work we do daily and how we feel about it. Careers are highly subjective and complex, unique to each individual and dynamic over time.

In our current world of work, the traditional view of a career as a relatively stable, linear and predictable sequence of work-related experiences no longer holds for capturing the multiplicity of sequences of work experiences, the large variety and inequalities in the careers of different groups of people, and the disruptions people encounter in their work over time. Moreover, traditional academic perspectives on careers no longer suffice for understanding (mental) health issues, including burnout, employability threats, and workplace trends such as 'quiet quitting' – all signaling a disconnect between what's needed for individuals to stay happy, healthy and productive throughout their career and what organisations are currently providing. Differently stated: the current context calls for innovations in career management theories and policies, as well is in career guidance and counseling.

In recent years, the topic of sustainable careers has received increased interest from scholars as a promising perspective to understand contemporary careers. First coined by Karen Newman in 2011, academic interest in the topic steadily increased after the publication of the *Handbook of Research on Sustainable Careers* in 2015 (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2015). Since then, academic publications have been on the rise, including a dedicated special issue in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Van der Heijden et al., 2020) and symposia at different conferences. At the same time, changes in the context have also brought the topic to the table of policy makers, (HR-)managers and other key actors (De Vos et al., 2016).

Sustainable careers research focuses on the dynamic interplay of person, context, and time to study how person-career fit can enhance the long-term sustainability of people's careers (De Vos et al., 2020). Recent research has applied the sustainable career model to, for example, the challenges of career sustainability for different groups of workers (e.g., contingent workers, Retkowski et al., 2023; managerial mothers, Michaelides et al., 2023), the processes involved in career sustainability over time (e.g., Richardson & McKenna, 2020; Van den Groenendaal, 2022) and the interplay of multiple stakeholders in different contexts affecting sustainable careers (e.g., Donald et al., 2020; Hennekam et al., 2022).

The interest in protecting the sustainability of people's careers can be framed within the broader concerns for sustainability, i.e. the protection and renewal of the natural environment, the maintenance of equitable economic progress, and the realisation of social well-being (Greenhaus et al., 2024). Sustainable careers are typically seen within the latter category, as external forces (economic turbulence, changing employer-employee relationships, technological change, the pandemic and geopolitical threats) are impacting (opportunities for) employment and bringing along pressure and uncertainty. Within the current academic discourse on sustainable careers, most attention is going towards the implications of these forces for people's careers. There has been less attention for how solutions for these broader sustainability issues may also require people, and all stakeholders involved, to think differently about careers and how the choices people make throughout their career may contribute to resolving sustainability issues related to environmental sustainability – by joining sectors or organisations focusing on finding solutions rather than further depleting resources, as an example (De Vos et al., 2023). Career counseling plays a role in guiding individuals toward careers in occupations or sectors focused on enhancing sustainability rather than depleting it, as captured for instance by the notion of green careers. This can be seen as a personal and societal commitment to career sustainability and addressing global environmental challenges

In the current literature, sustainable careers are typically being conceptualised at the individual level, situating the individual in a broader career ecosystem (Baruch, 2015). At a more macro level, and seen from a broader sustainability perspective, there are clear links with several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 6 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) yet until now, the academic research on sustainable careers has developed rather independently from these goals.

A rapidly changing career context

Individuals' careers do not develop in a vacuum but are affected by the multiple contexts in which they unfold. In other words, careers are part of a wide and dynamic ecosystem which operates across internal and external labour markets (Baruch, 2015; Donald et al., 2024). This career ecosystem is not purely economic but is also part of a socio-political environment on a global scale. Within an ecosystem, actors create value through relationships, and within the career ecosystem, work and employment relationships determine careers and their outcomes. Similar to a natural ecosystem, it involves the flow of people, knowledge, and talent within a complex environment of labour markets and organisations (Baruch, 2015).

Compared to the past, this ecosystem has become more dynamic in many ways. The most prominent are the rapid changes and growth in certain professions (such as those related to technology and AI), the disappearance of other professions, changes in employment relationships, and shifting sectoral focuses (such as automation and the relocation of production capacity).

Careers are intertwined with a societal context and cannot be viewed separately from labour law, social law, and social security. Societal developments and government policies around these issues influence the sustainability of careers and the way organisations can and want to manage them. Several trends are emerging in our labour market, including growing workforce diversity, a structural mismatch between supply and demand, and a shrinking replacement ratio due to an ageing and shrinking population.

Moreover, careers are not separate from personal life contexts, which also evolve over time. Changes in family composition, shifting patterns in life stages, migration, and education levels all impact people's career needs, aspirations, and opportunities to find meaningful work and build a fulfilling career. Employees do not leave this personal life context at the door when they enter the workplace, so organisations must consider it in their policies.

Organisations, in turn, are confronted with a rapidly changing context in terms of informatisation, technology, and globalisation, making agility and speed the core of competitive advantage. However, success in this area is only possible when employees are willing and able to change as well.

To fully understand careers, one has to realise the influences of these multiple career contexts and the changes occurring within them, the career actors that take part in the play, and the dynamic nature of the system. Moreover, there are major differences in the characteristics of these contexts and how key actors are shaping the ecosystem across the world – both between and within countries – bringing along different challenges depending upon the geographical context.

Within this ecosystem, different actors may have different views on careers, different needs and possibilities, which means that what one party sees as a solution, another party may see as a problem. For example, from a societal perspective, policies around raising the retirement age provide a solution to keep pensions affordable, to protect social security systems as well as productivity. Yet, for many workers involved, it may create challenges to protect their health and stay employable in a context where there is much pressure to perform and adapt to rapidly changing jobs. Moreover, older job seekers often face prejudices from employers when applying for jobs. For employers, a higher retirement age requires measures in terms of employability and brings higher labour costs with a larger group of older employees.

Thus, the multiple and rapid changes in the environment have many implications for careers but also for the actors involved in policy making regarding careers, both at the organisational level and the societal level. Whilst organisations need to reconsider the meaning of an organisational career and how career development can be managed to match individual and organisational needs, policy makers are faced with challenges related to sustainable employment and the employability of all individuals in the workforce. For career counsellors, this calls for interventions that facilitate individuals' efforts to enhance the sustainability of their careers across the lifespan, taking into account the (changing) needs of multiple stakeholders involved.

The ultimate challenge this presents is the inherently dynamic, idiosyncratic and often unpredictable nature of careers. The complex combination of factors affecting an individual's career decisions, behaviors and outcomes over time requires measures that facilitate individuals in making career choices that are in line with their individual needs, that take into account the needs stemming from their private life context, and that also contribute to organisational (e.g. high performance, loyalty, employability) and societal (e.g. protecting wellbeing and welfare) needs.

Sustainable careers

Seen from an individual perspective, the rich variety of possible sequences of experiences making up an individual's career implies that we may encounter examples of both 'positive spirals' wherein career episodes over time become enriched, and 'negative spirals' wherein career episodes may be characterised by, for instance, demotivating or unrewarding experiences (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). As noted by Van der Heijden & De Vos (2015), the complexity of our world today entails many opportunities for individuals to make choices in line with their inner drives, but yet there is also an ample list of factors which endanger the continuity of careers or at least continuity in realising a personally satisfying sequence of work experiences. Moreover, what might appear to be a 'successful' or 'satisfying' career in the short run does not always remain so in the long run.

In other words, through the ways in which society, organisations and individuals deal with careers they either facilitate the sustainability of careers or put careers 'at risk' because they might become unsustainable over time.

Building on recent career concepts such as the boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994), the protean career (Hall, 2002), the kaleidoscope career (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005), the

customised career (Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007), and the post-corporate career (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997), Van der Heijden & De Vos (2015) introduced the notion of a sustainable career, offering a complementary but fresh perspective on the conceptualisation of careers in today's economy.

Sustainable careers refer to '*sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual*' (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015: 7). They imply the continuous development, conservation, and renewal of individuals' career-related resources over time.

Four core dimensions are thereby important to consider (De Vos and Van der Heijden, 2015): (1) time, (2) social space, (3) agency, and (4) meaning.

Time dimension: Longer and less predictable

The essence of sustainability is that there is continuity over time, i.e. that present needs are being fulfilled without compromising future needs. In that sense, the cycle of career-related events and decisions making up an individual's career over the course of one's professional life will determine sustainability of a career in the long run. Many different patterns of continuity are possible, whereby periods of employment can be interchanged by periods of part-time work, volunteering, unemployment, sabbatical leave, care-giving, and so on.

Recently, the time aspect of careers has gained attention due to increased retirement ages, resulting in longer careers. In addition, careers have become more unpredictable as organisations are more volatile and rapid technological changes are impacting jobs, leading to less fixed career paths.

Social context: From unidimensional to increasing complexity

Careers exist at the intersection of individuals and organisations. They are influenced by factors in both personal life contexts and organisational contexts. Both, in turn, are influenced by a broader societal context. Advances in information technology have decoupled work for many jobs from time and place. As a result, an increasing number of employees experience a blurring of boundaries between work and private life, a form of flexibility that offers opportunities for both organisations and employees, but also poses the challenge of maintaining healthy boundaries between work time and private time.

People also make choices across various life domains that impact their careers. For instance, an employee's career decision may be influenced by a partner's decision to accept a job abroad. People with young children may temporarily work less and later increase their work volume again. The traditional breadwinner model has been replaced by a dual-earner model, and there is a growing diversity in family structures that are less likely to coincide with predictable age categories, bringing along the need for caregiving (for children, parents…) at different life stages. All this makes careers today quite complex and—again—less certain and predictable. It also becomes harder for organisations to predict their employees' decisions.

Moreover, careers increasingly do not coincide with a single organisation where one spends their entire professional life. Employees who are more mobile generally experience more ownership over their careers when this mobility is self-chosen. At the same time, there are still large groups of employees experiencing high mobility due to a lack of job security, a succession of short-term contracts, or temporary employment.

Ownership: From organisation-driven to self-directed

Despite the many structural factors at all levels (personal circumstances, job, organisation, profession, society) that influence a career, the career ultimately belongs to the individual. This has always been the case, but with the overlap of a career with employment in the same organisation, it often seemed to many employees that their career belonged more to the organisation than to themselves. This was also reflected in the strong top-down approach characterizing organizational career management.

There is a general trend toward viewing careers as more independent from organisations than before. Employees are now considered responsible for their own career success and continuity. This 'ownership' of the career also brings increased responsibility, in a world that seems more complex, with seemingly more choices than ever. Ownership therefore requires the development of a set of career competencies, such as awareness of one's own talents, motives and needs as well as communication skills and proactive behaviors including feedback seeking and networking. Developing career competencies is therefore an essential ingredient of contemporary career policy.

Agency is also a timely topic when considering the sustainability of careers for those groups who are more vulnerable in the labour market (e.g., young workers without qualifications, unemployed older workers).The latter often experience a lack of agency due to a lack of required (career) competencies, or due to the negative experiences they encounter when putting this agency into practice without the desired result of obtaining a job.

Meaning of career success: From objective to subjective

Since contemporary careers conform less to the 'classic' definition— a succession of jobs, often organised hierarchically, with the same employer—career success is also less measurable in terms of salary, promotion, and status. People can have very different ideas about what a career means to them. Thus, the experience of objective career success, as reflected in achievements like salary, promotion, and status, has changed, with more emphasis now placed on subjective success. The advantage of these subjective values is that each employee can make their own career choices based on them. But it also implies a challenge. Satisfaction must come from one's own criteria, rather than from objective status symbols or evaluations by others.

Moreover, these success criteria are neither fixed nor predictable. What people find important in a job at the start of their career will often not align with what they find important toward the end of their career.

Our contemporary world challenges the extent to which a sustainable career can be achieved by taking a purely inside-out perspective. Careers are part of a global and rapidly changing socio-economic environment, which is not only affecting individuals' careers, but

whereby individuals' career choices also impact this environment. To turn around trends such as increasing inequality, biodiversity loss, climate change, and forced migration, there is a need for people to develop sustainability intelligence and a global mindset (De Vos et al., 2023). When subjective career success comes at the cost of, for instance, depleting resources, raising inequality or contributing to climate change, one might question to what extent this can be called a sustainable career.

Enhancing the sustainability of careers

There are challenges pertaining to the sustainability of careers for individuals in all key stages of the career life cycle. Depending on the career and life stage they are in, individuals may have different needs which call for different types of measures. For instance, individuals in their early career might need opportunities to put into practice what they have learned at school, young parents might need measures that allow them to combine career and care without compromising their future career growth. Older workers might need measures that enhance person-environment fit, for instance in terms of physical capacities or mental health, or allow them to transfer their experience to the younger generation through coaching.

To facilitate sustainable careers throughout the lifecourse it is therefore important to enhance person-career fit from a dynamic perspective. This means that the individual should be facilitated in career crafting to create a dynamic balance between what they need to be(come) and stay happy, healthy and productive over the course of their career, and what's needed from the organisational perspective – thereby acknowledging the multiple changes that may affect both parties' needs.

Employee health, happiness and productivity are typically being seen as the key indicators of a sustainable career (Van der Heijden, 2005; De Vos et al., 2020). Together these three indicators refer to careers at the crossroad of individuals and organisations, as they move beyond a mere focus upon individual career success criteria and (mental) health to also include outcomes that matter to the organisation. The reasoning is that to continue working in jobs that keep one happy and healthy, it will be important to also be mindful about what the organisational needs are in terms of performance and employability. From the organisational perspective, the idea is that to have keep people productive and employable, it will be important to address what they need in order to stay happy and healthy.

First, happiness refers to the satisfaction people gain from their work. Over time, people might change their perspective upon what's needed for them to stay satisfied – which might be due to ageing and increased (life) experience, but which might also be affected by events in one's personal of professional context making a person actively reconsider what's important for them to stay satisfied.

Second, staying healthy requires actions from both employers and individuals to ensure that there remains a fit between physical and psychological work demands and a person's capacities – taking into account changes occurring over time on both sides. This requires attention for how resources can be developed that help people cope with (changing) demands, not only at work but also in their private life sphere.

Third, to stay productive across the course of one's career, attention is needed for lifelong learning to sustain a fit with changing job requirements in terms of competencies. Careers can be seen as a sequence of learning cycles, successions of mini-stages of exploration-trial-mastery-exit, that people go through across their career. The key issue determining a learning stage will not be the chronological age but career age, where perhaps five years in a given occupation or sector may be midlife for one area or only the early career for another area.

Careers for a sustainable future: Opportunities for career counseling

There is a growing need to take into account the sustainability of careers when facilitating individuals in their career development – both when it comes to protecting their own career sustainability and when it comes to considering the implications of their career choices for broader sustainability challenges.

Regarding the first, this requires the development of a critical set of meta-competencies which enable people to be reflective about what's needed in order to stay productive, as well as happy and healthy throughout their career. In parallel with sustainability competencies, a sustainable career orientation implies a capacity to balance short-term and long-term thinking, and to consider the needs of multiple stakeholders. Career counselors can facilitate individuals in developing these meta-competencies by helping them to obtain insight into both their personal needs and opportunities as well as those within their context and the multiple stakeholders involved. It requires taking a broader perspective than only focusing upon finding work that fits with 'who I am, what I want, and what I am good at' to also include the broader life context, stakeholders therein, and addressing the potential longer-term implications of short-term choices.

Regarding the second, the current grand challenges our world is facing create an urgent need to broaden the meaning of a sustainable career as, through the career choices people make, they can impact sustainability in a broader sense. Thus, it is important to address not only how the context impacts careers, but also how careers impact the context. Career counselors can play a crucial role in this, by taking a broad approach towards sustainability and by exploring together with their clients how to find and keep work that is not only enhancing the sustainability of their own career over time but at the same time contributing to a more sustainable future for all. When doing so, providing people with a sufficient sense of control and believe that they can make a difference, will be important as bringing in these grand challenges may also induce fear and a feeling of not being in control. If career counselors can help people in finding work that matters – not only for themselves but for the broader context - it might help building the sense of control, resilience and hope that's so much needed in society today.

All this requires career counselors moving beyond the individual as the focal point of attention, for whom an (ideal) match is being sought with available jobs based upon their interests, needs, motives and talents. There is a need to bring in the multiple layers of context, and to help people understand and navigate this context. Career counselors can work collaboratively with educational institutions, green organisations, and policymakers for example, to channel individuals toward sustainable sectors in view of future-proofing careers and addressing societal needs.

This can be realised by expanding the focus upon career meta-competencies to include green competencies, such as knowledge of SDGs and sustainable practices, which are becoming crucial in many industries. Career counseling can help individuals acquire these competencies, which are vital for long-term employability in green careers.

To conclude, navigating today's world of work is complex and people will likely be challenged in their career development throughout their career journey. Career counselors can be a 'compagnon de route', providing guidance and helping people choose direction, supporting them to change course when needed, thereby providing the tools they need for crafting a sustainable career.

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Introducing career resonance

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5303

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To cite this article:

Brown, C. (2024). Introducing career resonance. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 53*(1), 18-23. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5303

Abstract

Following my presentation 'Introducing career resonance' at the NICEC Conference during 2nd-3rd July, 2024, I was encouraged to write an opinion piece for the NICEC Journal. In this opinion piece, I describe Rosa's theory of resonance. I argue that the concept of resonance has a relevance in a capitalist society. Following this, I explore both losing and having resonance and how this impacts well-being and has an association with psychological burnout. Next, I introduce career resonance and suggest how career professionals may help clients to foster resonance through their work. Finally, I emphasise that career resonance has a part to play in addressing psychological burnout and that career professionals may be called to deepen understanding and form collaborations with well-being professionals. In conclusion, I emphasise that human beings are born resonant and that career resonance has a relevance to everyone.

Keywords: Resonance; psychological burnout; career resonance

Introduction

All humans are resonant beings (Rosa, 2021), with a fundamental need for resonance. Often, we may dream about slowing down, but in fact, we may be intuitively seeking a different relationship with the world; one more resonant with people, things and places.

Science can help us by confirming that we are essentially energetic beings in an energetic world, with differing vibrational rates (Judd, 2020). Such fine, unique energy fields can be captured by the Kirlian camera and seen with the naked eye (Priyadarsini, et al.,

2014). In essence, Kirlian photography involves recording electric fields from an object and converting it into an image on photographic film. Moreover, this sense of vibration is reflected linguistically in the Latin derivative 'resonare', which literally means to return to sound, or to sound and resound, almost like an echo (Vistnes & Vistnes, 2018).

Exploring further, Rosa (2019) helps us by describing a resonant world relationship as a reciprocal and mutual relationship between us and the world that brings about a transformation. In this relationship, Rosa (2021) describes four inherent qualities:

- affection - when something speaks to us, leaving us feeling moved;
- self-efficacy – when on being emotionally-touched, we respond and take action;
- transformative – when in the moment of resonance, something shifts; and
- elusive – with such circumstances being uncontrollable and emergent.

Hubner (2021, p.225) eloquently summarises this, noting that 'the concept of resonance is a comprehensive system program of hope'. We may have such a resonant relationship with hobbies, a location, another person and our work.

Why is this relevant now?

Within a modern capitalist society, we have a desire to progress, which requires growth, acceleration and innovation to stand still (Rosa, 2021), such time pressures create a reality that accelerates so rapidly that we cannot keep up. Ridgway et al. (2024) argue that this sense of acceleration is a consequence of the societal context in which we live. Needing to deliver more each year with the same resources or cut our resources to deliver the same impact, is so intrinsic to our way of functioning that we may not even notice (Lijster & Celikates, 2019). This can impact us individually in different ways. We may have a fear of being left behind, needing to climb so as to keep up and not lose our place within society or we may have a desire to expand our horizons and increase what is available, attainable and accessible (Rosa, 2021).

Through such shifts, we can often become disconnected energetically from our world. Our relationship with the world can lose its significance, with it being cold and indifferent (Rosa, 2021). These circumstances can be compounded by the desynchronisation of different systems. With this desire for acceleration, pressures are put on different societal systems to move faster. This accelerated pace can jar against slower systems and be too fast for nature's organic rhythms. Such sentiment is encapsulated by Sir David Attenborough's statement that we 'have a finite environment – the planet. Anyone who thinks you can have infinite growth in a finite environment is either a madman or an economist' (cited in Cardwell, 2013). Many of us inherently recognise this pursuit of acceleration as unsustainable, and seek a more connected, balanced relationship with the world. We can find ourselves 'in a world that is moving too quickly, for us to sit with anything' (Chaffee, 2022). With many feeling out of kilter, a longing for resonance is increasing (Zalec, 2021).

What happens if we lose resonance?

With these increasing demands for acceleration, our psyche may not be able to keep up with the speed of change, leading us to burn out psychologically. Our connections may

become non-resonant, and we may become mute in our relationship with our world. Such a shift can lead to depression, dissatisfaction and a sense of meaninglessness. Our energy and vibrational rate can lower. 'Meaningless […] can be interpreted as the absence of resonance, as meaning is born when the wire of resonance begins to vibrate' (Rosa, 2019, p.199). A sense of alienation within the world can often emerge from this drive towards growth, time-saving and efficiency (Buhl, 2023).

Such consequences are being witnessed around us. Brian Dow, the CEO of Mental Health UK says that the UK is 'rapidly becoming a burnt-out nation', with 35% of people experiencing high or extreme pressure at work in the past year (Moloney, 2024). Such prevalent burn out from ourselves, our work and our communities, requires us to reflect upon what we can do. As Rosa (2024, p.49) declared in a recent speech 'burnout is the opposite of resonance'. So, finding resonance is part of our solution.

What is it like being in resonance?

We may experience resonance in different ways. We may find resonance with objects or artefacts, and with people and communities. Also, this may be more broadly with how we experience life, through our connection with nature, art, religion or history (Zalec, 2021). We are in resonance if we are touched, where energy moves back and forth. If we are impacted emotionally, and if we are left altered or shifted in some way. The term 'emotion' is derived from the Latin work 'emotere' (Chin, 2023) which can mean energy in motion (MacKenzie, 2007).

Subconsciously, we may attract energetic connections into our life for the purposes of healing and growth. Often, we can be drawn to someone or something, that has a quality that we need to draw out from ourselves, allowing us to access more of ourselves; as they say, opposites attract. Over time, we can begin to rely on our own intuition to find connections for the expression of our own essence or purpose. When we are in resonance, we can experience joy, meaning and existential hope that in the end everything will be okay. Indeed, 'a resonant relationship with the world […] allows a person to feel supported and safe' (Zalec, 2021, p.6).

Introducing career resonance

What happens when we consider resonance within the context of careers? Drawing upon Yates' subjectively-constructed and all-encompassing definition, we can define career as 'if you think that it's a career, then it is a career' (Yates, 2014, p.9). Consequently, I would argue that career resonance is relevant to all of us that work.

On moving Rosa's theory of resonance into the world of careers work, I propose that career resonance is when we have a resonant relationship with our work and it is balanced in the context of our life. Consequently, on experiencing career resonance with our work activities, we are left moved and emotionally-touched (affection), which motivates us to respond (self-efficacy), leading to personal growth (transformative) and the experience of something that is emergent and uncontrollable (elusive) (Rosa, 2021). Exploring this further, career resonance is where we are positively affected, experiencing positive emotion and joy. At the end of the day, we are left with a sense of energy, where we can

find meaning and fulfillment in our work. It has an organic, elusive and individual quality. Consequently, career resonance is not something that can be manufactured, targeted or instructed; instead, it is something to be gently fostered.

So as career professionals how can we help our clients to foster career resonance? As with all our practice, it is important to enter the client's world, and to meet the client where they are. In cases of burn out, resonance can be absent (Rosa, 2024). As well as being separate from our community, we can feel alienated (Buhl, 2023) and disconnected from ourselves. Consequently, we can support our clients in their personal reconnection. Here, we can draw upon psychological research for guidance, for example the mindfulness research led by the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, a joint-collaboration between the Oxford Mindfulness Foundation and the University of Oxford. Such mindfulness research can support the nurturing of our personal well-being, for example drawing upon understanding offered by the three major emotion systems: threat and self-protection; incentive and resource-seeking; and soothing contentment (Gilbert,2010). A balance across these emotion systems contribute to our well-being and enables us to live a rich and fulfilling life. Such insights help us to see how we can reduce individual stress and nurture a more soothing and peaceful existence. So rather than offering a sticking plaster solution, it can become apparent that mindfulness research can indeed help to get to the heart of the matter.

As well as reconnecting personally, we can support our clients in their reconnection with others. In fact, burn out and depression can be seen as a form of grief, for all the connections we need but do not have (Hari, 2019). Whilst depression may be caused by a chemical imbalance in some cases, it can now be seen for many as 'suffering from a social and spiritual imbalance in how we live' (Hari, 2019, p.313). 'Social prescribing' in which people are connected to community services, groups, and activities to support their improved health and wellbeing offers one that we can help to foster longer-term happiness and resonance (Hari, 2019; Post, 2011).

Focusing in on our career practice with clients, we can continue to foster career resonance by helping our clients to reconnect with their heart. Incisive questions can help to strengthen this, for example: What brings you joy? What makes your heart sing (not sink)? What gives you energy? When do you experience unexpected tears? Reflecting on past experiences of resonance can help us to feel our call from the world and to use it to guide our life (Carosin et al., 2022). During longer client interventions, research-based approaches to support our clients to find purpose and meaning are readily available for us to learn about, embrace and draw upon. Furthermore, there is a role for us in helping people to understand, critique and even change the accelerationist society in which they live.

Conclusion

Within our capitalist society, with its inherent drive for acceleration, it is not uncommon to lose resonance. We can lose our sense of connection with ourselves, our work and place in the world, impacting negatively our wellbeing. I argue that career resonance is part of our solution to counter such psychological burnout, and that the concept of resonance, particularly as developed by Rosa is worthy of further research, theorization and thinking within the field of career education and guidance.

As career professionals we can play our part in addressing this by drawing upon a career resonance lens in our practice, where clients are feeling burnt out and seeking a more meaningful and fulfilling life. Preparatory ground-work may involve further learning in less familiar areas, deepening our own insight and wisdom on the matter, whilst also unearthing and letting go of any misplaced beliefs. Moreover, we can further serve our clients through extending our own practice whilst forming collaboration with fellow well-being professionals.

Being born resonant, humans have a fundamental need for resonance. Career resonance is for everyone. If we are able to engage with this and bring it into our work Hari (2019, p.245) argues that 'we can infuse our work with greater meaning […] not just a few privileged individuals, but for the whole society.'

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Article
10.20856/jnicec.5304

Enhancing a career development curriculum by embedding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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To cite this article:

Ho, Candy T. Y. (2024). Enhancing a career development curriculum by embedding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 24-35. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5304

Abstract

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals provide a framework for addressing global challenges, linking environmental sustainability to individual and social well-being and social justice. This article explores how embedding the SDGs into career development can enhance career exploration and contribute to a sustainable future. Drawing on experiences from teaching a senior career capstone course, it highlights strategies for integrating the SDGs into career interventions. Key components include developing personal mission statements, researching organisations, analysing future work trends, and conducting informational interviews. The article also presents anecdotal evidence of the course's impact on students' thinking and provides practical advice for implementation.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals; career development; higher education; social justice; curriculum; Canada

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations created the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), offering a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges. Described as 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into

the future' (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024a, para. 1), the SDGs were conceived to guide national and international policies. At the same time, there is an opportunity for career development professionals (CDPs) to leverage the SDGs as a framework that can enrich career planning and exploration.

As the need for sustainable careers increases (De Vos et al., 2020), it is important for individuals to consider sustainability alongside their career aspirations (Russo et al., 2023). The SDGs can provide a robust framework for integrating these considerations and linking environmental sustainability to individual and social well-being, as well as social justice (Ho, 2023). By embedding the SDGs into career development practices, CDPs can help clients explore meaningful work opportunities that contribute to global solutions.

This article is a reflective thought piece, drawing on the author's practical experiences from teaching a senior career capstone course and insights presented at the 2024 NICEC conference. Rather than presenting empirical findings, the article offers actionable strategies and reflections on the integration of SDGs into career development practices. While the integration of SDGs into career curricula shows significant promise, this piece provides an exploration of the potential benefits and the ongoing efforts needed to fully realise their impact in diverse educational and professional contexts.

The SDGs

The SDGs, adopted by all 193 UN member states, address a wide range of global challenges. The 17 goals, as well as the 169 targets based on the goals, focus on issues such as poverty, inequality, health, education, and climate change. For instance, an SDG with an explicit connection to career development is SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), aims to 'promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all' (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024b, para. 1). Key indicators for SDG 8 include reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training.

At the heart of the SDGs are the 5Ps: Planet, people, prosperity, peace, and partnerships (UN, 2015). They guide the overarching mission of the SDGs.

- **Planet**: Protecting our natural resources and climate for future generations.
- **People**: Ensuring all humans can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality.
- **Prosperity**: Ensuring all can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives.
- **Peace**: Fostering peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.
- **Partnerships**: Implementing the SDGs through a spirit of global solidarity and strengthened partnerships.

In 2020, the UN launched the Decade of Action (UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2024c) to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. The initiative calls for urgent and transformative measures to address the most pressing global challenges before they lead to irreversible consequences for our collective livelihoods. The Decade of Action emphasises the need for increased ambition, financing, and global partnerships to drive the change necessary to meet the SDGs' targets.

Recent research has emphasised the relevance of these goals, not only at the policy level, but also in shaping individual aspirations and career planning. Santilli et al. (2023), for instance, developed a scale for assessing individuals' alignment with the 2030 Agenda, demonstrating the utility of the SDGs in personal goal setting and career development. Moreover, Sterling (2001) advocates for sustainable education as way to reconceptualize learning, aligning educational goals with broader societal needs—a concept central to the SDGs. Such research highlights how the SDGs can serve as a guiding framework for students and professionals alike, encouraging them to think critically about their roles in global sustainability.

The SDGs and career development

The SDGs share several commonalities with the principles and objectives of career development. Firstly, both are fundamentally oriented towards achieving social justice. The SDGs aim to ensure that no one is left behind by, addressing inequity issues and promoting global partnerships. Similarly, the field of career development emerged from a commitment to social justice, with one of its primary aims being to provide career guidance to alleviate poverty and support underserved populations in finding meaningful and decent work (Hartung & Blustein, 2002; Hooley et al., 2018; Jones, 1994). This in turn aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Watts (1996) provides a foundational perspective on the socio-political ideologies that underpin career guidance, highlighting how the field can serve various ideological purposes. Watts reinforces the idea that career guidance is not ideologically neutral but can be directed toward achieving broader societal goals, including those related to social justice and sustainability. Career development, thus, plays a critical role in addressing inequalities and promoting equitable opportunities for all. Robertson (2021) expands on this by arguing that career development policies can be designed to support broader societal goals, including those articulated in the SDGs. This perspective underscores the potential for career guidance to not only address individual aspirations but also contribute to social justice and economic sustainability on a global scale.

Secondly, the SDGs call for a collective effort to tackle the world's most pressing challenges by leveraging individual knowledge and talents. Career development assists individuals in identifying their strengths, interests, and skills, and through doing so, enable them to discover opportunities and environments where they can effectively utilise these attributes (Brown & Lent, 2012; Chen & Hong, 2020). Arur and Sharma (2019) emphasise that the SDGs act as semiotic resources within career guidance, providing students with a framework through which they can navigate their career decisions in a way that aligns with global priorities. Savickas' (2013) career construction theory supports this, as it aligns personal strengths with broader societal needs, a concept central to the SDGs. This approach enables individuals to construct careers that not only fulfill personal goals but also contribute to societal well-being.

Thirdly, by aligning personal skills with global needs, individuals can pursue professional roles that are both meaningful and impactful. This alignment empowers them to realise their purpose and contribute to their communities in significant ways. The SDGs provide a framework encouraging individuals to perceive their potential impact as extending beyond their immediate surroundings, fostering a sense of global responsibility (Wilson, 2018).

Integrating personal and professional goals with broader societal objectives enhances motivation and satisfaction. As well, Di Maggio et al. (2020) highlight the importance of career adaptability in the context of sustainable development, suggesting that by incorporating SDGs into career education, students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce, develop resilience, and maintain hope as they pursue careers that contribute to global well-being. Finally, Nota et al. (2023) discuss the importance of inclusivity, sustainability, and equity—core aspects of the SDGs—in guiding career development practices, reinforcing that career guidance should consider not only individual success but also the well-being of society and the environment, aligning personal career goals with the broader objectives of the SDGs.

The SDG framework thereby prompts individuals to consider several essential questions (Ho, 2021):

- What is the world I want to live in?
- What global problems or opportunities need my attention?
- How can my talents and experiences address these problems?
- What do I care about?

Integrating the SDGs in a university career capstone course

Education 4100 (EDUC 4100) is a fourth-year undergraduate course at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), open to all students with at least 60 course credits, which is equivalent to completing two years of undergraduate studies. KPU is a regional teaching university with five campuses in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. The University's teaching designation ensures that classes are small, with a maximum of 35 students per course section.

As a popular elective, EDUC 4100 attracts students from various disciplines, including arts and humanities, business and commerce, sciences, health sciences, and design. The multidisciplinary makeup of students fosters interdisciplinary discussions, encouraging students to draw from their academic fields while learning from their peers, ultimately enhancing the class's collective learning experience. EDUC 4100's course objectives include (KPU, 2024):

- reflecting on educational experiences by examining artifacts;
- investigating and preparing for work and further educational opportunities;
- developing representational portfolios for post-university life; and
- considering what it means to be 'educated' in students' own context.

The design of EDUC 4100 is intentionally aligned with pedagogical ideologies that emphasize social justice, sustainability, and the development of a global consciousness. As Watts (1996) argues, career guidance is not ideologically neutral; it often reflects socio-political values that influence how career development is practiced. In this course, the integration of the SDGs is a deliberate choice to align career education with these broader societal goals. According to Winter (2023), effective careers and employability

learning should empower students to navigate their career paths while being mindful of their broader societal and ethical responsibilities. EDUC 4100's use of SDGs as a guiding framework aligns well with this approach, fostering a learning environment where students are encouraged to reflect on how their careers can contribute to global challenges.

The subsections following explore specific course components and how the integration of the SDGs enhances career development and learning for students.

Personal mission statements

A major component of the course is the ePortfolio project, where students identify a realistic professional opportunity that they may pursue as a next step. Within their ePortfolio, they compose application documents and assemble a complete package for their chosen opportunity, such as a first job after graduation, or application to graduate or professional schools.

A central element of the ePortfolio is the personal mission statement. To craft this statement, students begin by examining organisational mission statements to understand their purpose: What is the organization's ultimate goal, and how does it intend to achieve it? What challenges does it aim to address? These questions help students reflect on their own professional aspirations by asking similar questions: What do they aim to accomplish in their professional lives after graduation? Who are the people and communities they wish to serve? How do these individuals and communities benefit from their work and efforts? Overall, this exercise enables students to identify their core values, align their actions with these values, and seek future workplaces that support this alignment.

In addition to creating their personal mission statements, students provide a brief description of their development process, resulting in a rationale statement where they highlight the SDGs they aim to advance. For instance, Alyssa, an accounting student, created the mission statement: 'I enable people to make informed decisions they can feel confident about.' She reflected on how her work in providing accurate financial data aligns with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through the use of management accounting practices to address resource inefficiencies. While mission statements are designed to be brief for ease of memorization, the rationale provides space for students to ponder the significance of each component in their statement and how they plan to succeed in their future professions while addressing global challenges.

Organisational research

In the course, students also research organisations they aspire to join, or if they are hoping to start, entrepreneurial ventures, emulate. This research involves examining seminal company documents such as mission and vision statements, strategic plans, and corporate social responsibility mandates. Through this analysis, students assess how their own values align with those of the organizations, thereby facilitating informed career decision-making (Smith et al., 2023).

The course also examines B Corporations (B Corps) as exemplars of organisations that balance profitability with social and environmental responsibility. B Corps are certified for their adherence to high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability,

and transparency (Canadian B Corp Directory, 2024). As part of the certification process, organisations articulate and substantiate how they align with the SDGs. In the course, students identify B Corps they want to learn more about, analysing how these organizations align their sustainability claims with concrete actions. This exercise helps students understand how leading organisations can 'walk the talk' by integrating sustainable practices into their operations.

Furthermore, students evaluate how organisations contribute to the advancement of the SDGs. They identify practical examples of organisational success and areas where the organisations may fall short. For instance, several students expressed interest in working for the United Nations (UN) and discovered that internship opportunities offered by the UN are generally unpaid. The finding prompted a class debate on the implications of accepting unpaid internships with their dream organisations, enriching the overall learning experience, highlighting the complexity and multifaceted nature of career decisions. Students collectively generated recommendations, such as writing to the UN to express their concerns, explaining how unpaid internships might contradict SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). They also suggested the UN to identify funding partners to ensure interns can be compensated.

Frigerio (2024) emphasises the importance of recognising signature frameworks that guide career development practices, as well as their relationships, and impact on clients: 'The emancipatory potential of career development work and the importance of systemic perspectives (acknowledging the interplay of all influences in the individual, social, and societal environmental systems that the systems theory framework depicts) are further potential signatures' (p. 101). The UN debate illustrates one approach to teaching career development and highlights the importance of being attentive and responsive to student needs and curiosities, remaining flexible, and being willing to adjust strategies as learning evolve.

Future work trends

In EDUC 4100, students also examine various reports on the future of work (i.e., Creative Futures & CERIC, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2024). By synthesising information from multiple sources, students can identify key trends shaping the future and the implications for their professional trajectories. Doing so enables them to better position themselves to influence these potential futures by reflecting on their existing skills and experiences, as well as identifying those they need to acquire.

The integration of the SDGs adds a valuable dimension to this analysis as students evaluate whether these trends will facilitate or impede the advancement of the SDGs. For example, students interested in promoting SDG 4 (Quality Education) might investigate how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), can enhance access to education for underserved populations. Concurrently, they examine the ethical considerations of using AI to fulfill SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), ensuring that technological advancements are leveraged responsibly and equitably.

Information interviews

The culminating course project is an informational interview assignment where students identify and interview three or more individuals who embody their potential future career

paths. Students prepare and pose questions to these professionals, gaining insights into their career journeys to inform their own career decision-making processes. A secondary project objective is for students to practice establishing networks within their desired fields, thereby gaining confidence in building professional relationships.

After conducting the information interviews, students reflect on the conversations and the key themes that emerged. They identify insights that confirmed or challenged their current career perspectives, evaluate their own performance as interviewers, and articulate their next steps, including additional individuals they might wish to interview. They also connect their reflections back to their identified SDG(s), often highlighting how their interviewees advance these goals through their work and how they can do the same in their work.
For example, Kory, a criminology student, identified SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) as a primary interest. Through his interviews, he realized that his passion for ensuring a clean and adequate water supply could lead him to pursue a career in law. He noted that legal arguments can be made to ensure clean and safe water as a human right, a realization reinforced by his interviewees, who pursued law to protect human rights. This reflection helped Kory consider human rights law as a potential career path and how he can contribute to SDG 6 through legal advocacy.

Insights on impact

While this article is not intended to present empirical findings, it can be useful to consider the anecdotal evidence gathered through informal surveys conducted as part of the course wrap-up. In the survey, a question was posed to capture students' reflections on how the SDGs influenced their thinking about career development: 'In what ways, if any, did the UN SDG(s) help you learn more about yourself and your career development?'

Over two academic years, from Fall 2019 to Spring 2021, 367 students responded to this question. The qualitative responses revealed three distinct levels of reflection:

- **Individual level:** Students acknowledged that one person can indeed make a difference, recognising that daily actions can help advance the SDGs. However, they also realised the immensity of the challenge, understanding that no single person can address an SDG alone, which underscored the importance of collective effort.
- **Career level:** The SDGs expanded students' perspectives on potential career paths. They discovered that the SDGs and their indicators could help them identify additional occupations they had not previously considered. Moreover, students felt a sense of duty to serve as they see opportunities to contribute to the SDGs through their work and professional aspirations.
- **Community level:** Students came to understand that advancing the SDGs requires collective efforts. They realised the importance of collaboration and the synergies that can be harnessed by working together as a community of change agents, in both paid and unpaid roles they serve. This communal approach fostered a deeper appreciation for teamwork and partnership in achieving the SDGs.

One student succinctly connected career success with the SDGs, stating: 'I realised through this course that if I want to have a successful career, I need to think about how I want to serve the world first.' This quote encapsulates the transformative impact of integrating the

SDGs into career education, highlighting the shift in students' thinking towards a more holistic and purpose-driven approach to their careers.

In the future it will be important to build on these insights with a more structured and systematic investigation capable of producing robust empirical evidence. However, the current evidence does support valuable reflections on the potential impact of integrating the SDGs into career development curricula.

Advice for implementation

Having discussed various activities in the course that incorporate the SDGs, practical advice for integrating the SDGs into broader career development practices is shared in this section.

Utilise the SDGs for career exploration and purpose

As a first step to incorporate the SDGs into career exploration, CDPs can encourage clients to think deeply about their capabilities and how they can enable them to address global challenges. CDPs can start by using the SDG framework to guide conversations. For example, they might pose questions to clients such as, 'Which SDG resonates most with your personal values?' or 'How can your skills and interests contribute to solving global issues like climate change or inequality?' CDPs can also engage clients in a career mapping exercise where they identify potential careers that align with their chosen SDGs. For instance, if a client is passionate about SDG 13 (Climate Action), CDPs could help them explore roles in environmental policy, sustainable architecture, or renewable energy. Additionally, CDPs can help clients research and explore how specific industries are contributing to the SDGs, which might involve reviewing corporate sustainability reports, analysing industry trends, or even interviewing professionals in the field. A client who identifies SDG 4 (Quality Education) as their passion may explore roles in educational technology, nonprofit work, or policy advocacy focused on equitable access to education.

Encourage lifelong learning and flexibility

In today's rapidly changing world, fostering a mindset of lifelong learning and adaptability is crucial (McGowan & Shipley, 2020). One approach is to assist clients create a personal development plan that outlines how they can engage in ongoing education and professional development that align with their career goals and relevant SDGs. To do this, CDPs and their clients can research and recommend certifications, workshops, or courses in emerging fields like artificial intelligence or sustainable business practices, and then incorporate these possibilities into their personal development plan. Clients can also take part in scenario planning exercises to envision different futures based on trends like technological advancements or climate change, where CDPs can encourage them to ponder how being adaptable and continually learning can help them thrive in these potential futures. For instance, a client interested in SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) could be encouraged to pursue courses in digital transformation, smart infrastructure, or project management to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving job market.

Integrate values with career aspirations

Aligning clients' personal values with their professional goals is essential for long-term satisfaction and success (Arieli et al., 2020). To facilitate this alignment, CDPs can conduct workshops where clients identify their core values, then explore how these can be integrated into their career planning and decision making. At the same time, CDPs can encourage clients to research potential employers' values and mission statements to ensure they align with their own personal values. This research might include reviewing company annual and sustainability reports or speaking with current employees about the organisation's culture and ethics. Furthermore, CDPs can help clients search for job opportunities specifically within organizations known for their commitment to the SDGs, such as B Corporations or companies with strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. For example, a client passionate about SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) might be guided to seek out roles in sustainable supply chain management, as well as organizations that honour such practices, aligning their career aspirations with their commitment to reducing waste and promoting sustainability.

Advocate for social justice and collaboration

Promoting fairness, equity, and collaboration in career development activities is crucial for advancing the SDGs. Watts (1996) maintains that career development can serve various socio-political ideologies, and when aligned with social justice, it can empower individuals to challenge systemic inequalities. CDPs can encourage clients to consider how their careers can contribute to social justice by exploring roles in nonprofit organisations, social enterprises, or governmental agencies focused on reducing inequalities. Additionally, CDPs can support clients on fostering networks with like-minded professionals and organizations. This could involve attending SDG-focused workshops and conferences, joining professional groups, or participating in online forums that discuss social justice and sustainability. For instance, a client interested in SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) might be encouraged to connect with local elected officials to learn more about advocacy, social work, or policy-making, in order to discover ways they can actively contribute to reducing disparities in society as a citizen and a professional.

Conclusion

Integrating the SDGs into career development practices offers a promising approach to aligning individual career aspirations with global sustainability goals. By embedding the SDGs into educational frameworks and professional guidance, we can enhance clients' sense of purpose and career satisfaction. This holistic approach empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to address global challenges, supporting the broader societal objectives of sustainable and equitable development. While the initial outcomes from implementing the SDGs in career curricula are encouraging, further exploration and adaptation in diverse contexts are needed to fully realise their transformative potential.

As career development professionals, our role is pivotal in guiding individuals to harness their talents and passions in ways that contribute not only to their personal success but also to the well-being of the planet and society. Through thoughtful implementation and continuous reflection, we can build a robust framework for career development that

endures, ensuring that our collective efforts contribute to a better world for present and future generations.

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Article

10.20856/jnicec.5305

Embedding the concept of Decent Work in career development learning

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To cite this article:

Cunningham, E., Christie, F., Deakin, R., & Jones, K. (2024)). Embedding the concept of Decent Work in career development learning. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 36-50. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5305

Abstract

In this article we raise questions about the dilemmas and practicalities of developing 'critical consciousness' in career practice. We outline theory and policy that has been instrumental in the evolution of a Decent Work informed approach to career learning. Inspired and informed by our own research about graduate transitions and young people in precarious work, we conclude by highlighting resources we have developed in partnership with the 'Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter' team for embedding Decent Work in career development learning.

Keywords: Decent work; career; UK; Higher Education

Introduction

Employability is a major focus in higher education in many countries (Dalrymple et al., 2021) and the role of universities in the development of human capital has driven public policy for decades. In the UK, where we as authors are based, this has led most recently to 'Graduate Outcomes' becoming a success measure for universities as required by the Higher Education and Research Act (2017). However, critical employability research (e.g., Clarke, 2018) has highlighted the limitations of what universities and their students can achieve to foster employability in the face of labour market uncertainties and inequalities; there are enduring concerns about the risk of individualising structural challenges in policy and practices.

University students in England face several pressures in addition to the primary focus of studying to pass their degree. They are effectively responsible for financially supporting themselves through university as funding for tuition fees and maintenance has diminished over the past decade. At the same time, they are responsible for making themselves attractive to future employers (enhancing their 'employability').

It is easy to make the mistake of referring to student careers as a future concern, yet the reality is that an increasing number of students already work and may have done for several years, often in relatively poor quality, low skilled jobs. This presents a challenge and an opportunity for career professionals working in higher education to engage in critical discussions about quality of employment and how the working students of today can become the decent leaders of tomorrow.

We as authors share an interest in applied research that is useful for practice with the first and second authors being former careers advisers. Individually and collectively, we undertake research and impact-focused work through the Decent Work and Productivity research centre at our university. The work we describe in this article is informed by various research projects undertaken with students and recent graduates (Christie & Swingewood, 2022; Cunningham et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2023). Between us, we teach every student in our department a careers module for a whole semester at every year level and in addition offer an optional module dedicated to Decent Work. This affords us opportunities and time to embed career development learning which may not exist in all settings, however, the ideas and resources we present here may be transferable and adaptable for other university settings and client groups.

The article is structured as follows: The first section discusses the meaning of good and decent work; the second section explores the relationship between good and decent work and career development scholarship and practice. The third section reviews existing debates about student work. Fourthly, we move on to outline the potential value of legal and psycho-social literacies as concepts for career and employability learning, before finally introducing an open access resource about Good Work that we have created with the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter team for students and university career professionals.

Decent Work and the Good Work Movement

Decent work, partnered with economic growth, is Goal 8 of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (ILO, 2019). The UN Goal seeks to influence national governments and employers to embrace the principles of decent work into their own contexts. There are four pillars associated with the goal: 1) employment creation/ access to work; 2) rights at work; 3) social protection; and 4) social dialogue. Principles of dignity, equality, fair income, safe working conditions and worker voice underpin these pillars.

In the UK, the term 'good work' or 'fair work' is more commonly used, with influential reports (Irvine et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017) helping to define good work as well as recognise the erosion of working conditions in some parts of the economy. Other policy-oriented work from the European Union uses the language of job quality (Eurofound, 2021) to highlight issues related to decent work. Notably, while national employment legislation in

the UK stalled between 2010-2024 (the newly elected UK government promises to reverse this trend) devolved regions and nations have attempted to stimulate good work over and above any UK-wide employment regulation.

Across the nations of the UK, the concept of decent work has been borne out in the Good and Fair Work Movement (Jones & Kumar, 2022). This has emerged via regional employment charters, relevant professional associations, i.e., the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), as well as through the work of trade unions. For example, the CIPD's annual Good Work Index (Wheatley, 2022) identifies seven core characteristics of good work: 1) pay and benefits; 2) employment contracts; 3) work–life balance; 4) job design and the nature of work; 5) relationships at work; 6) employee voice; and 7) health and wellbeing. Across all definitions utilised in measures, issues emerge relating to objective vs subjective notions of good work (Jones et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2018). Thorny issues remain about how individuals evaluate the quality of their work.

The role of Decent Work in career development scholarship and practice

Decent work is a topic which attracts interest from diverse disciplines (Christie et al., 2021), including human resource management, economics, sociology, social policy, psychology, international development and political economy. It is also of growing interest to career development scholars and practitioners, especially for those who foreground a commitment to social justice (Blustein et al., 2023; Christie et al., 2020; Hooley et al., 2021; Kenny, 2024). Notably Duffy et al. (2016), position Decent Work as central to their psychology of working theory, viewing it as something that can satisfy core human needs. An awareness of decent work is helpful to career development professionals. It has the potential to surface difficult issues about both decent and indecent work in a way that helps to navigate tensions between optimism and realism in practice with students. Such questions align to debates about the scope for critical consciousness-raising in career development scholarship and practice.

Hooley et al (2021) argue for building critical consciousness in their five signposts for a social justice informed approach to career guidance; alongside naming oppression, questioning what is normal, encouraging people to work together, and working at a range of levels. Blustein and his co-authors in the psychology of working theory (Duffy et al, 2016) propose that critical consciousness can moderate the negative effects of marginalisation. They build on authors from education such as Freire (1996) and Watts (2002), and argue that it comprises of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. Although scholars have long argued for the benefits of critical consciousness, there have been limited strategies about how to enact such ideas in practice with clients. Sometimes even professionals who are aware of inequalities and injustices in the labour market can struggle to find ways to highlight such challenges to clients due to a fear of diminishing optimism, or a sense that managers may not be convinced of the value of such a critical approach (Buzdugan, 2020). This has implications for both work with clients but also wider Careers Service policies (e.g., with employers and vacancy-handling). It is important to stress that a 'critical' approach does not imply blame or criticism which could lead to defensiveness and hostility, rather it acknowledges the messy complexity of contemporary workplaces.

Research indicates (Christie & Swingewood, 2022; Cunningham et al., 2022) that many people are well aware of labour market injustices so this is not something that career development professionals should shy away from either. Some recent graduates told us in our research (Cunningham et al., 2022) that they felt they had been misled during their time at university, believing a meritocratic narrative that if they worked hard then success would naturally follow. This shaped their experiences, expectations and decisions post-graduation and they implored us to tell students what it is like after graduation, about the difficulties they faced in finding a good job and how long it took. That research highlighted that it could take at least a year to settle into a 'successful' job and yet a positive discovery of the studies was that many did secure quality 'graduate level' jobs. Similarly, in research during the pandemic, we also observed considerable movement and change in young people's circumstances over time. We also found that young people were able to recognise labour market injustices and welcomed the opportunity to discuss in/decent work, although were often vague about their employment rights (Christie & Swingewood, 2022). These research findings motivated us to find a way to balance a realistic picture of the challenges and pitfalls with a genuine hope and optimism for the future. This paper seeks to describe some of the ways in which we have tried to do this.

Student experiences of in/decent work

The issue of student employment in the UK has recently become the focus of government, media and research attention (Neves & Stephenson, 2023; Wright et al, 2024). Diminishing financial support and the increasing costs of independent living have driven students to accept the reality of working alongside their studies (Allen et al. 2024) Students occupy an interesting position in the labour market as they may be precarious workers, often in zero-hour contracts in service industries such as retail and hospitality and yet this is generally accepted as a temporary state of affairs and even a rite of passage.

The rise of flexible working, for example, zero-hour contracts, alongside the increased individual responsibility for higher education costs may seem convenient as students can, in theory, fit their work around their studies. However, this flexibility is likely to be oriented to employer needs so students may find they are trying to fit their studies around their job or risk losing it. Although many universities have made provisions such as condensed timetables to support students' work, there are still consequences of poor class attendance and compromised grades.

Rydzik and Kissoon (2022), in their study of student-workers in the UK hospitality sector, suggest that poor quality work socialises young people to accept and internalise norms of the neoliberal workplace, for example, to accept subservience, emotion suppression and even sexual harassment. They also highlight inequalities which are widespread in the hospitality sector, such as roles segregated along race and gender lines. Their study highlights how student-workers feel they have little power to challenge unfair work practices, instead exercising their agency by changing jobs frequently. The article also highlights the need for employability learning to include working rights and to encourage students to be reflective and ethical, *'equipping them with a vocabulary to deconstruct neoliberalised practices'* (p.12). The authors call for universities and student unions to work with local employers to raise standards for student employment and have developed a charter to facilitate this (University of Lincoln, 2023).

Working is often considered to help students enhance their employability through building a track record of experience and transferable skills, (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007; Knight & Yorke, 2003). Aside from economic capital, working can accrue valuable 'graduate capitals': human, social, cultural, identity and psychological (Tomlinson, 2017). Arguably, even having a poor-quality job could motivate people to work harder and to discover things they don't want in a career – a phenomenon Houston & Cunningham (2017) call 'career misery push'. In their research into the working lives of young women, Allen et al. (2024) found that students felt they learn a lot from dealing with rude customers, for example, in hospitality jobs. Callendar (2008, p.374) however, suggests that this kind of student employment is likely to further disadvantage the poorest and least qualified students. Part-time, term-time working carries an opportunity cost, making students less available for other opportunities such as volunteering, extra-curricular activities, socialising or even basic self-care. This 'juggling' of work, study and life can take its toll on mental health (Antoniadou et al., 2023).

It is a mistake to refer to students' careers as something that has not started yet and is for the future. A wider definition of career includes their current and previous work and learning experiences. Jackson (2016) refers to the important development of pre-professional identity for university students. This is gained through a range of experiences, especially those that are related to work. For the current cohort of students, this early career has already been disrupted by a global pandemic followed by a cost-of-living crisis, both of which have adversely affected the kind of jobs that young people may tend to experience (e.g., hospitality and retail). Such 'low-skilled' roles are increasingly disappearing too with the growth of technology (e.g., self-checkouts and ordering food at tables on using an app) further engraining a sense of the insecure and competitive nature of work, as students may feel they have to accept 'any job' to top-up loans. Meanwhile, student-workers are also future leaders, employers, business owners and policymakers of the future. Supporting students (and other clients) in recognising what constitutes good and poor-quality work and what to do about it can raise standards for students now and for the benefit of their future employees.

So, how can we do this, as career professionals?

Critical consciousness in career education and counselling: The development of Legal and Psycho-Social Literacies

The tools and strategies career professionals use in their work require expertise and judgement to achieve the best outcome for students and clients. There are deeply engrained attitudes and beliefs in practice about the nature of the relationship. Principles of impartiality and person-centred guidance may pose some awkward ethical dilemmas. For example, should we promote unpaid internships (Buzdugan, 2020)? Do we openly discuss cash-in-hand jobs or sex-work, which may be a concern for some students? If a student discloses that they are facing racism or sexism in their bar job, how do we react? If a student comes straight to university from a nightshift and falls asleep, do we accept they need to earn money to support their studies or berate them for lack of commitment?

Career education and guidance is sometimes criticised for being overly focused on individual agency and detached from structural inequalities and the realities of individual circumstances. Good career development learning will explore the systemic relationships

and tensions between these influences (e.g. McMahon & Patton, 1995). This calls for professionals to develop their own and their clients' literacy in legal and psycho-social domains so they can appropriately advise and support students in navigating the complexities of the contemporary workplace.

Literacy is a popular term in the field of education (for example, carbon literacy, digital literacy, information literacy) but what does it mean, how is it different from knowledge or a skill and how does it apply to career development? Literacy in a more general context might mean learning a language, fluently conversing in it and being to judge what to say, when and how. This will be dependent upon many subtle cues such as the social context, timing and interpersonal dynamics. It might also mean atuning to and adjusting the message in real-time. As such, 'literacy' can be a useful concept for career professionals in sensitively augmenting their expertise with an orientation towards good work. Care must be taken though, not to talk about literacies as if they are neutral commodities (Jones, 2018: Staunton, 2018), rather it is essential to recognise contextual inequalities regarding how individuals are able to acquire such skills and learn to mobilise them in their everyday lives.

In a recent article for employability professionals (Christie et al., 2023), we introduced the concepts of legal and psycho-social literacies. We view these as aligning with the development of critical consciousness in career development (Hooley et al., 2021; Duffy et al., 2016). The term *legal literacy* describes not only an awareness of employment rights but also knowledge of how these rights can be exercised. Career development learning provides a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of working rights and how to recognise when they may be transgressed. For example, even basic employment rights like receiving payslips and paid holiday are often not upheld in the UK. Beyond this awareness, students need to understand what they can do if their rights are being undermined and where to go for support.

Psycho-social literacy means being able, as a career professional, to recognise and encourage clients to explore what good work means to them and how to find or negotiate it. Research has long established the psycho-social significance of work and there is consensus that factors above and beyond the basic terms and conditions of a job (such as pay and hours worked) can significantly impact how people subjectively experience their work. For example, having a good line manager, social support and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities can make a significant difference to satisfaction, wellbeing and ultimately productivity. While some aspects may be explicitly discussed or written down, there are many more subtle things such as behavioural norms and expectations or how people treat each other which Rousseau (1995) describes as the 'psychological contract'. Students, particularly those who are neurodiverse or without prior work experience, may find this particularly puzzling and stressful.

On a practical level such literacies can be developed by making students familiar with typical scenarios and issues can help them to mentally prepare strategies. Scenarios can highlight both good and bad practices. Many employers treat their student workforce well and have a lasting and transformative impact on those fortunate to work with them. Student employment is not only precarious jobs in retail and hospitality but also includes placements, internships and even volunteering. Many placement students later progress into graduate roles with the same company emphasising the mutual benefits of quality

working relationships. Highlighting positive working practices and considering how and why they work can provide inspiration and practical ideas to enhance employment and is key to navigating the optimism/realism challenge associated with a more critical approach to career and employability learning.

Embedding the concept of Decent Work in career development learning: A practical example

We are fortunate to work closely with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) under the authority of mayor, Andy Burnham. GMCA have been proactive and forward-thinking in establishing the 'Good Employment Charter' which encourages organisations to commit to raise standards relating to seven criteria: secure work, flexible work, pay, engagement and voice; recruitment, people management, and health and wellbeing (Halford, 2023).

Over the past few years, Manchester Metropolitan University researchers have worked in an award-winning partnership with GMCA with research-led initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter evaluation and a good practice toolkit (Crozier, 2022). GMCA's Charter team had already published resources for schools and colleges about good employment before working with us to develop a similar resource for universities in the region. In partnership with GMCA and in consultation with students in our faculty, we created a resource to help students recognise good (and poor) employment (Halford et al, 2024). The resource defines aspects of good work and poses questions they can ask of their job or employer or in their career research (see Box 1) relating to each of the Charter criteria.

Box 1: Example questions on recruitment

The employer has excellent recruitment practices, involving prospective employees in an inclusive, fair recruitment process that is accessible, enables both equality and equity, eliminates unconscious bias, and supports the building of a diverse workforce.

Questions you might ask the employer:

- If I am selected for interview, is it your policy to share interview questions beforehand so that I can best prepare myself?
- Can I claim expenses for attending an interview with you? (if I need to travel)
- Before arriving for interview, will I be informed of who to ask for at reception?
- If I am successful, what does onboarding look like?
- Will you inform me of recruitment timescales so that I might know when to expect to hear the outcome?
- Following the recruitment process, will you provide me with feedback about whether I am successful or not?

The process of developing these resources has taken about a year and has involved consultation with stakeholders at different stages. We first approached GMCA with the idea after seeing the schools and colleges resources then liaised with the head of the Charter team to adapt them to the higher education context, integrating our professional expertise, insights from our research and anecdotal evidence from students and graduates about issues they faced. The content was approved by the Charter team and endorsed by the mayor, Andy Burnham, with a foreword. During its creation, we sought feedback about it from students in diverse ways and discussed it with Careers Service colleagues. Most recently, we also delivered a workshop at the NICEC conference with career professionals. Although it has been well-received so far this project is still 'work-in progress' and we would very much welcome feedback on the resources from practitioners from any settings.

Guidance and discussion are recommended in introducing the resource to students and considering how best to use it. The guide is not suggesting that students simply ask prospective employers a long list of questions about good work, especially not at interview. The definitions of good work criteria and questions in the guide prompt students to do more research about companies and jobs, for example, through review websites (e.g., Glassdoor or RateMyPlacement), through detailed reading of job descriptions, contracts or in discussion once a job has been offered.

There is a section designed for students who may not have a conventional employer, for example, those working freelance, self-employed or in the gig economy. Of course, students may be aware that their working conditions are not perfect and yet they may either be happy to accept this as a means to an end or else feel powerless to challenge this. Additionally, although there may be some agreement on what constitutes good work, there are likely to be some individual considerations and differences. For example, in some industries (e.g. creative, media) the only route in may be through exploitative, precarious or even unpaid positions. Students may accept a trade-off and be willing to accept such conditions as a short-term compromise (Cunningham et al, 2022). Again, this is where career professionals can help students make informed and contextualised career decisions.

Building on this resource, we developed a toolkit to help career professionals and employability educators to introduce concepts around good work in an up-to-date and relatable way. Our toolkit includes a quiz about working rights and links to a 'How Good is your job' questionnaire. In addition, we created several realistic scenarios (e.g. Box 2). which are based on stories our students have told us they experienced. Each scenario can either present multi-choice answers to choose from or form the basis of a lively and skilfully chaired discussion about the rights (and wrongs) of the situation. Crucially, students can consider actions they could take and possible consequences.

Box 2: Recruitment challenge scenario example (options and suggested answers)

1. You travelled to another city for an interview for a graduate job. You are unsuccessful and when you ask about interview expenses, you are told that only successful applicants can claim expenses. What do you do?

a. Shrug your shoulders and put it down to experience.

Not really OK. *Although this seems pragmatic, it's always good to reflect upon experience and reduce the risk of it happening again, especially as this experience has annoyed you.*

b. Review the information you had received before the interview to double-check this was included. If it was in the small print and you hadn't noticed, make a decision that you will always check this kind of detail for any future applications (and potentially not attend interviews if no expenses available).

Definitely OK. *This is a sensible response and how an employer deals with such matters is a good indicator of how good an employer is and whether you would want to work for them.*

c. Take to GlassDoor and write a damning review of the employer's bad practice.

OK but not ideal. *This may make you feel better in the short-term and review sites are useful. Post a review but make sure you write it in a way that is useful to others. This option may not address what you have learnt from the experience.*

d. Go to the Careers Service and ask them if this is normal practice in the Graduate recruitment market and if there are ways to avoid such a thing happening to you again.

Definitely OK. *It's really good to get advice from the Careers Service. They also work with employers so might be able to influence better practice in this area if you let them know about the details of what has happened.*

One of the challenges with the resource will be keeping the information up to date as things can quickly change, especially in the wake of a new government promising to focus on workers' rights. The resource signposts to specialist sources of advice such as the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS, n.d.). Career professionals do not need to be employment law experts but knowing where to access such advice is helpful. We have designed the resources so they can be freely available and easily adapted. We would envisage they could be used in educational settings either as materials for a standalone careers or employability session, e.g. by a personal tutor. Our university careers team have suggested that some of the topics could

be incorporated into web-based information and regular training sessions (e.g. interview skills) and guidance interviews (e.g. considering various opportunities through a lens of decent work; openly discussing rights and working conditions).

The resources will be used in tutorials within our university as well as being shared with other Greater Manchester universities. The aim is to support both students and career professionals and employability educators in recognising characteristics of good work and building a critical consciousness around poor quality work. Sometimes students may feel responsible for problems they face at work and think they just have to accept them. Open discussions may help them to feel less isolated and empowered to challenge the status quo. This work is informed and underpinned by career development scholarship that is social justice oriented and advocates critical consciousness (Hooley et al, 2021; Duffy et al, 2016). The five signposts to social justice (Hooley et al, 2021) have been influential to our approach. Issues of good employment are collective issues, not individual, and through our partnership with GMCA and universities we are able to work at a range of levels to drive changes.

The next stage of the process may be to work with local employers (e.g. Charter members and supporters) who employ students to enhance the quality of their work and ask their views of the resource created for students. Efforts to increase good work also contribute to policy aspirations to retain more graduates in our growing region (Brophy, 2024). The growing movement of organisations dedicated to creating a better future is indeed heartening. This trend is not unique to our region and is borne out in other regional and national Employment Charters. More ethical approaches to business are also evident in the growing B Corp (B Lab UK, 2024) movement. B Corps are businesses that have been certified by B Lab to meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability

Conclusions

It is not always easy to deliver messages about challenges and unfairness in the labour market to students who have invested so heavily in their career. However, 'building a critical consciousness' (Hooley et al., 2021) can reassure students they are not alone and that they do not shoulder sole responsibility for establishing a successful and rewarding working life. Being transparent and sensitive in discussing workplace issues can equip our students to find good work now and to create good work for others in their future roles.

It is unfair and ineffective to expect students to shoulder the responsibility for challenging poor working conditions on their own. The following recommendations may be useful for major stakeholders - students, career professionals, Student Unions, universities and employers.

Students

- Openly communicating with tutors and career professionals about work-related issues is important as they share the ultimate goals of positive educational and occupational outcomes and can offer advice, signposting and help develop strategies.
- Working together to challenge unfair practices (e.g. report them, support each other, collective action e.g. through student and trade unions) is more effective than standing up to them alone.

Career professionals

- Career development work is not always about being impartial, sometimes it calls for judgement, labelling unacceptable practices and actively intervening.
- Career development is as much about helping students make sense of the present as it is planning the future. This does not necessarily mean we have to be experts in employment law, but we do need to know the questions to ask and where to signpost to.

Student Unions

- Collectively campaign to raise the standard of student employment. Facilitate quality jobs which are open to students, for example, placements, paid internships and part-time roles on campus.

Universities

- Embedding decent work into the curriculum particularly, teaching students about their employment rights, is a valuable element of employability and can help students to recognise unacceptable practices.
- Universities have a role to play in advocating to employers how both sides might benefit from student-friendly policies and providing opportunities for students to develop valuable skills and become future leaders.
- Create case studies showcasing good employers and opportunities for them to engage with students. Normalise sharing narratives of typical student-graduate transitions in promotional literature as well as the traditional 'success' stories.
- Universities have a responsibility to be good employers themselves both of students they employ as well as regular staff.

Employers

- Employers can work with local universities and engage students in developing and sharing good practice.
- Strive towards good employment for all, not only as a legal obligation or to enhance productivity but to re-establish the dignity of sustainable work as a social good.

Policymakers

- Financial support for students is in urgent need of reform. Adequate support would reduce the need for students to work long hours.
- The increased cost of living is a wider economic issue and yet one which hits students hard. Regulating private accommodation costs and offering free or subsidised transport could alleviate some of the financial pressure.
- Any review of working rights (e.g. banning zero-hour contracts) needs to consider the impact on the working student population.

Good employment can mutually benefit employers in retaining employees; universities in retaining students who achieve positive outcomes and students' quality of life. Career professionals are well-placed to advance this cause.

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Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2024, Issue 53

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5306

How possible is fulfilling work for mid-life women: A review of the empirical psychology literature

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To cite this article:

Walker, L. (2024). How possible is fulfilling work for mid-life women: A review of the empirical psychology literature. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 51-67. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5306

Abstract

There are over nine million women aged 40-60 in the UK alone, but they remain under-represented in the psychology and career literature. Whilst there is limited research into fulfilling work for midlife women, this broad review identified 50 related studies offering important clues for women themselves and practitioners working with them. It seems fulfilling work is possible for midlife women, but they are likely to face more, and different, challenges compared with men or other women. Five key insights are highlighted and specific findings for midlife women summarised.

Key words: mid-life; women; career; work; fulfilling work

Introduction

With longer working lives, sustaining fulfilling work becomes more important. Despite this, few organisations are proactively addressing the retention, value and promotion of older workers including midlifers (Gordon & Whelan, 1998; Strenger & Ruttenberg, 2008; Irving, 2018). What suits people at 20 may well be different to what is fulfilling at 40 or 60.

Mid-life can be a uniquely challenging time with the collision of social, physiological and emotional challenges (Lachman et al., 2015; Ryan, 2023; Jackson, 2019). Fulfilment is highly pertinent to mid-lifers as the need for meaning appears to grow through

the lifespan, only peaking beyond 65 (Baltes, 1980). Choices made at this stage can significantly impact future health, wealth, wellbeing and happiness in later life (Lachman et al., 2015).

> Midlife is a critical inflection point for later health, productivity, and retention, yet this aging stage is overlooked in the process model and generally in the workforce aging literature (Burke & Grandey, 2020).

In career counselling practice, fulfilling work is often positioned as a central, aspirational goal, but remains largely undefined. Recent vocational psychology literature (since 2016) does offer several options, but they are still to be tested with many different groups, including midlife women.

Women make up a major portion of the labour force. Globally, roughly half of working age women participate in the labour force, compared with 80% of men. Rates vary considerably across regions – under 20% in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to over 60% in East Asia and the Pacific (World Bank). Similarly, midlife women represent a large portion of paid workers. About 47% of U.S. workers between 40 and 54 years old are female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

For midlife women, the dominant narrative, in popular and organisational literature, is one of decline and struggle, exacerbated by menopause and empty nest syndrome, but is this validated or challenged by the empirical psychology evidence?

Key terms

Fulfilling work

In career counselling, ‘fulfilling work’ is not specifically defined but is often considered as part of an individual’s career decision making process – what would make your work fulfilling to you? Vocational psychology, however, offers several recent, broader definitions:

> Work fulfilment as work that is personally satisfying and meaningful (Duffy et al., 2016).

> Fulfilling work is the complete, integrated, and comprehensive experience of well-being in the work context (Owens, Allan, et al., 2019a).

> Fulfilling work is a holistic and complete sense of wellbeing and flourishing in the work context (Allan et al., 2019).

There are several other terms related to ‘fulfilling work’ including meaningful work, engaging work, satisfying work, decent work, and good work. Whilst all these terms were included in the study search criteria, ‘fulfilling work’ is the main focus of this review for three key reasons.

- To acknowledge the possibility of different types of work (paid, unpaid, fulltime, part-time, portfolio, voluntary etc) and sources of work fulfilment.

- To bridge across disciplines as 'fulfilling work' is an identified concept in career counselling, vocational psychology, HR, management, and coaching.
- To include an 'internal felt-sense' of the work experience to balance traditional external measures of work success or achievement.

Midlife

Search for 'midlife' online and you are inundated with page after page of midlife crisis symptoms and advice about how to deal with them. The term 'midlife crisis' was coined by Jacques in 1965. His work, however, was based on male patients and has not since been replicated. Other studies found little evidence that a crisis is any more likely in midlife than at any other time, although the impact of a major life event may have longer lasting implications (e.g. Johnson et al.,2009).

Across Europe, there seem to be varying perceptions of the length of midlife. If midlife is the gap between when youth ends and old age begins, the European Social Survey data suggests that midlife could be between 40 and 62. Interestingly, there is less consensus around when youth ends than old age begins. The end of youth ranges from 34 in Norway to 52 in Greece with a mean of 40. Old age ranges from 55 to 68 with a mean of 62 (AGE UK report, 2011; DWP report, 2011).

Whilst the issues with defining mid-life by age are acknowledged, this study uses the range of 40 to 62.

Midlife women

This review focuses specifically on midlife women rather than all midlifers. Existing vocational psychology literature suggests women's work experience (generally and in midlife) is different, potentially significantly different (Ellemers, 2014; Flores et al., 2021; Fouad et al., 2023). Midlife challenges are described as 'physiological, social and emotional' (Jackson, 2019) and are likely to be experienced differently across gender. Finally, stereotypes about midlife are thought to be particularly harmful for working women and ambivalent for men (Burke & Grandey, 2020; Finkelstein et al., 1995; Gordon & Arvey, 2004; Ng & Feldman, 2012).

Midlife women are a significant population and a major part of the workforce. Understanding more about what fulfilling work means and the factors that influence its availability for them could benefit the women themselves, practitioners who work with them, organisations, and even society.

Review strategy and method

Given there are no specific studies into 'fulfilling work for midlife women' a broad approach was taken to this particular search. Studies were included if they addressed fulfilling work / midlife / women (or any combination), were empirical research, and psychology-related.

Mid Life (ML) including 40-62	27
Women specific	35
ML women specific	25
Fulfilling work (FW)	3
Adjacent to fulfilling work	14
ML women & adjacent to FW	0 (pre 2006)
ML women & fulfilling work	0

Table 1: Focus of the study (n = 50)

Of the 50 studies reviewed, only three tackled fulfilling work with any population, and 14 considered related concepts, including decent work, meaningful work, career satisfaction, fulfilment of career dreams, and Kaleidoscope Careers.

Thirty-five studies focused on women specifically and 25 of these were with midlife women. 36 specified a country, of which 24 were in the United States and there was a cluster in California. Other locations were Canada, Australia Iran, South Africa, and the UK. Almost half were quantitative studies. Many used large, pre-existing datasets and nine were longitudinal. Many drew participants from college alumni cohorts.

Mixed method	7
Quantitative	24
Qualitative	11
Systematic / narrative review	8

Table 2: Study type (50 in total)

Of the 11 qualitative studies, 10 examined the experience of 'midlife' or 'older' women. Six of the mixed method studies included midlife women only participants. Of the eight literature reviews, three were large scale systematic reviews of women's careers (not just midlife women). The earliest study was from 1986 and the most recent from 2023. There was a relatively even spread across time, with approximately 12 per decade. Whilst a thorough search was conducted, it may not be exhaustive.

Several other authors have called for more studies into the intersectionality of women's careers with race, social class, LGBTQ, health and ability status, and age (Fouad et al., 2023; Flores et al., 2021; Burke & Grandey, 2020); highlighting the lack of representation of the complexity of issues faced by midlife women.

Findings – research insights

Five key insights emerged from the literature and these are reviewed in turn and potential implications for midlife women highlighted.

1. Work fulfilment seems to be predicated on decent work
2. Fulfilling work goes hand in hand with health and wellbeing
3. The nature of fulfilling work can shift through the life course
4. Fulfilling work tends to be a different experience for women and men
5. Knowing if work is fulfilling is largely subjective, a felt sense

1. Work fulfilment seems to be predicated on decent work

An influential theory in this field is the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF) which aims to explain the structural and psychological factors that intersect to provide access to decent and then fulfilling work (Blustein et al., 2008).

The PWF's definition of 'decent work' is derived from the International Labour Organization.

> Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (Blustein et al., 2008).

The PWF was operationalised into the Psychology of Work Theory (PWT) in 2016 which underscores the significance of contextual factors, especially economic constraints and social identity-based marginalisation (Duffy et al., 2016), all issues that may be pertinent to midlife women.

The proposed predictors of decent work in PWT have received empirical support and the model appears to be applicable to a variety of population groups, including workers of colour in the U.S. (Duffy et al., 2018, 2019), LGBTQ workers (Douglass, Velez, Conlin, Duffy, & England, 2017), transgender and gender nonconforming workers (Tebbe, Allan, & Bell, 2019), workers in China (Wang et al., 2019), college students in Korea (Kim et al., 2019), and workers with chronic health conditions (Tokar & Kaut, 2023). There have not been any specific studies for midlife women.

Some researchers, however, argue that the 'decent work agenda' neglects individual psychological experiences and may not fully explain the experience of people not close to poverty (Nourafkan & Tanova, 2023).

The literature suggests that several of the theorised predictors of decent work such as economic constraints, marginalisation, high work volition and high career adaptability may be less favourable for many women (Flores et al., 2021; Fouad et al., 2023).

In terms of the economic context and economic constraints, a few studies highlighted the relevance for midlife women. A study of five college cohorts found later cohorts benefitted from 'societal liberalisation', progressive social and economic climates for women, compared with earlier cohorts (Schuster, 1990). Self-esteem was significantly and positively related to the role of paid worker, more than the unpaid roles of wife and mother (Baruch & Barnett, 1986). Gender differences requiring women to negotiate between home and work life continue into midlife and beyond (Emslie & Hunt, 2009a).

Marginalisation can impact midlife women with the intersectionality of gender and other factors, such as age, race or ethnicity. Studies found the potential for fulfilling work differs by social class and privilege (Allan et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2016; Tokar et al., 2023), culture and race (Kim & O'Brien, 2018; Owens et al., 2019), age (Allan et al., 2021; Dordoni & Argentero, 2015), intersectionality e.g. gendered ageism (Itzin & Phillipson, 2003; Ross, 2023; Still & Timms, 1998; Ryan, 2019), and quality of relationships including violence (Allan et al., 2020; Fouad et al., 2023; Lightbody et al., 1997; Marcinkus et al., 2007).

Midlife women's career decisions are often constrained, impacting work volition, being 'part of a larger and intricate web of interconnected issues, people, and aspects that had to come together in a delicately balanced package' (Leonard & Burns, 2006). Support to overcome constraints seems to be particularly important, and has been shown to impact hope (Cheavens et al., 2006) resilience (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005; Brown & Yates, 2018; Klohnen et al., 1996), challenging stereotypes (Dordoni & Argentero, 2015), authenticity (Mainiero & Gibson, 2018a), balance (Marcinkus et al., 2007), and a sense of control (Barnett & Baruch, 1978).

According to Savickas, career adaptability is a construct that 'denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development' and includes concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas, 2002). Several of the studies reviewed support the impact of related concepts for midlife women including career importance (Roberts & Friend, 1998), interest in their work (Ryan, 2019), control, (Lachman, 2004), positivity (Brown & Yates, 2018), self-esteem (Baruch & Barnett, 1986) and self-awareness (Maree & Nortjé, 2022).

Given the many constraints midlife women can experience, the possibility of fulfilling work could be less available to them. Access to decent work along with meaningful support to build work volition and overcome these constraints seem to be central to the possibility of fulfilling work.

2. Fulfilling work goes hand in hand with health and wellbeing

The second insight is that health and wellbeing are closely linked to the possibility of fulfilling work, in fact they may go hand in hand. When wellbeing is better, so are the chances of fulfilling work. All three key fulfilling work theories emphasise the role of wellbeing, but not necessarily in the same way.

The Model of Fulfilling Work developed by Allan at al. in 2019 suggests fulfilling work is *all* about wellbeing, with four well-being related components interacting and contributing to the general factor of 'fulfilling work'. Their components address job satisfaction (hedonic cognitive), meaningful work (eudaimonic cognitive), work engagement (eudaimonic affective), and workplace positive emotions (hedonic affective). Hedonic well-being – living a pleasurable life. Eudaimonic well-being – living a meaningful and actualised life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Affective well-being – reflects current emotional states. Cognitive well-being – retrospective evaluations, such as global evaluations of job satisfaction (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006).

Similarly, the authors of the Strengths-Based Inclusive Theory of Work (S-BIT of Work) assert that fulfilling work is the 'complete, integrated, and comprehensive experience of well-being in the work context… a set of overlapping and dynamic individual positive experiences that scholars have historically conceptualised as well-being variables'. They acknowledge that people in different contexts may understand and experience well-being in different ways, placing emphasis on different aspects (Owens, Allan, et al., 2019).

The PWT positions wellbeing rather differently, arguing that work is an essential component of mental health and an outcome alongside fulfilling work. They define higher well-being is 'indicative of higher life satisfaction, higher positive affect, and lower negative affect' (Duffy et al., 2016). According to them, psychological needs are predictors of wellbeing and fulfilling work, and group these need into three basic need groups (Allan et al., 2020, Duffy et al., 2016).

- Survival/power needs, which relate to basic physiological necessities such as food and shelter, as well as access to structures of opportunity like education systems.
- Social contribution needs, which reflects the human need to contribute to and feel a sense of belonging to a community.
- Self-determination needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

They claim the relationship between these needs and work fulfilment and well-being has been empirically supported, not just theoretically. When these needs are met, fulfilling work and wellbeing are viable outcomes.

Wider midlife research also supports the importance of physical health and wellbeing to the experience of midlife, balancing growth and decline (Lachman, 2004). Is this also the case for midlife women? Whilst there have been no specific studies of the PWT for midlife women, a few related studies broadly support the influence of health and psychological needs on wellbeing and fulfilling work.

Stressful working conditions can affect mental and physical health which influences decisions to change labour force activity for midlife women (Abramson, 2007). Health status is a predictor of career satisfaction in older professional women (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005).

Women with high career momentum scored higher on measures of self-acceptance, independence, effective functioning and physical health in their early 50s (Roberts & Friend, 1998). Ego-resiliency was shown to be 'a powerful personality resource that

enables individuals to adaptively negotiate the challenges of this period' in a longitudinal US study (Klohnen et al., 1996). Both rumination and effective instrumentality mediated the relationship between regret and well-being (Stewart & Vandewater, 1999). A sense of meaning is higher when women can fully express themselves in their work (Kiely, 2000). Women who have fallen short of their earlier career goals can suffer from lower life purpose and greater depression, even after controlling for social background, human capital, family, and health characteristics (Carr, 1997).

Whilst the nature of the relationship between wellbeing and fulfilling work is unclear, the available evidence does point to an association for midlife women too.

3. The nature of fulfilling work can shift through the life course

Life stages and the life course have been of interest to psychologists for a long time. For example, Levison proposed eight stages including a 'mid-life transition' stage from age 40 to 45 and a 'questioning and modification' stage from age 50 to 55 (Levinson, 1978). Life course theory (LCT) is a more recent interdisciplinary theory that seeks to understand the multiple factors that shape people's lives from birth to death with key themes including the 'interplay of human lives and historical time, linked or interdependent lives, human agency in making choices, diversity in life course trajectories, and developmental risk and protection' (Hutchison, 2011).

Even though the career counselling literature does not specifically define fulfilling work, career theorists and practitioners do expect people's work aspirations to evolve. For example, Savickas' influential career construction theory is grounded in constructivism, expecting and encouraging sense making to be continual and contextual (Savickas et al., 2009). The Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and Social-Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2001, 2003; Lent & Brown, 2019) both argue that individuals construct their own meaning of career, both at macro and micro levels, in relation to complex influences.

Health psychology has recognised the intricate interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors for some time. For example, the biopsychosocial model 'construes human health as a product of the reciprocal influences of biological, psychological, interpersonal, and macrosystem contextual dynamics that unfold over personal and historical time' (Lehman et al., 2017). Given the interrelationship of wellbeing (physical and psychological) and fulfilling work, it seems likely that age related changes would also influence the experience of fulfilling work.

The social and psychological impact of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination can shift and occurs in many intergroup contexts. Ageism is the most prevalent form of prejudice and can be experienced by both older and younger people resulting in prejudice, discrimination and ridicule (Bratt et al., 2020). Almost all (93%) of older people (age 50 to 80) regularly experience at least one form of ageism according to a large US study (Ober Allen, J. et al (2020). Research also suggests age stereotypes can involve both positive and negative stereotypical beliefs simultaneously (Dordoni & Argentero, 2015).

In the case of gender, descrimination experienced by women can be both hostile and benevolent (Sutton and Douglas, 2019). The term 'gendered ageism' was first introduced

by Itzin and Phillipson in 1993 as they studied age barriers at work with a particular focus on gender. Since then, it has been defined in a variety of ways, with the concept of 'double jeopardy' a common theme. Others have even pointed to a so-called 'triple jeopardy' as appearance has been posited as a further interactive dimension of ageism against women (Granleese & Sayer 2006; Handy & Davy 2007; Jyrkinen 2013; Jyrkinen & McKie 2012).

Despite 'gendered ageism' being widely used, some authors suggest the concept is underdeveloped. For example, Krekula et al (2018) argue it needs to be considered as 'a socio-cultural practice involving privilege, subordination, and inequality requiring us to rework existing conceptualizations of multiple marginalizations and of gendered ageism'

Overall, it seems the experience of work can shift over time, influenced by many factors including biological, psychological and social. Yet Fouad et al. (2023) argue that 'there is sparse research examining the effects of women's age on their career trajectory' (Fouad et al., 2023). However, some of the studies reviewed provide clues on how age influences women's experience of career. Several authors used The Kaleidoscope Model of Careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) to explore how three factors – authenticity, balance, and challenge – shift in importance over time. They suggest mid-career women prioritise finding balance, the desire for authenticity increases across the lifespan, and several unique meanings are associated with the idea of authenticity and balance in later life (August, 2011; Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero & Gibson, 2018b).

The impact of life events is also considered. One study found when historical and social events coincide with early adult experiences there is a greater impact later in life, that for those not going through a formative experience at the time (Duncan & Agronick, 1995).

It seems to be common for women to make changes in early middle age (late 30s), and to engage in a process of life review and midcourse correction. (Stewart & Ostrove, 1998). Role transition turning points for women were more common before midlife, and personal growth ones after midlife, but adversity can occur at any time (Leonard & Burns, 2006).

Whilst non-US evidence is limited in vocational psychology, the wider literature does suggest the experience of fulfilling work is likely to evolve through the life course and influencing factors may affect midlife women differently.

4. Fulfilling work tends to be a different experience for women and men

Several writers argue that women-specific career research is needed to better represent women-specific challenges, not adequately explained by male dominated theories. Worldwide indicators clearly show that women are socially and economically disadvantaged relative to men. For example, in relation to earnings, career and education opportunities, freedom of dress and movement, victimisation in sexual and domestic violence, and representation in political, business and religious leadership (e.g. Rhode, 1989; World Economic Forum, 2017).

In relation to fulfilling work specifically, women face challenges associated with the continual negotiation between personal lives and lives at work, multiple role management, difficulty in securing adequate mentoring experiences, sexual harassment, inadequate pay, job quality, workplace climate, and relational factors (Flores et al., 2021; Fouad et

al., 2023). They are over-represented in part-time work and in 'feminised' sectors and occupations characterised by low and variable earnings, poor working conditions, and limited advancement opportunities.

Career progression structures and processes may also be more of a barrier for women. Difficulties with advancement, more challenging transitions especially if time is taken off between jobs (Cabrera, 2007), implicit bias decreases the odds women will enter and perform in male-dominated job levels or organisations; 'glass cliff' effects make career development less attractive for women; 'queen bee' effects prevent women in leadership from acting as role models for other women (Ellemers, 2014). Women also seem to receive less of a benefit from skills mastery than men do, potentially due to the structural barriers women face in the workplace (Reynolds et al., 2007).

Since the 1990s, some theorists have added contextual variables to emerging or existing theories, arguing this reduces the need for women-specific models. For example, PWT includes specific recognition of marginalisation due to sexism influencing work volition and adaptability (Duffy et al., 2016). Lent and colleagues added proximal and distal contextual factors to the Social Cognitive Career Theory including environmental supports and barriers (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019).

If the possibility of fulfilling work is predicated on decent work along with the meeting of security, social and self-determination needs, women may well find fulfilling work is less available to them than men.

Researchers suggest that a sense of meaning for women in midlife comes from having the opportunity to fully express themselves in their work as the unique women they are, without having to adopt ideals set forth in the masculine script for men (Kiely, 2000). Executive midlife women seem to share three particular ambitions: enjoyment and innate interest in the work; flexibility from an organisation to give them space to 'feed all areas of their lives'; and the ability to grow and develop inside and outside the organisation. It is worth noting that this study did not consider whether these were unique to midlife women rather than men (Ryan, 2019).

In contrast to men, writers suggest the career histories of women are relational with their career decisions part of a larger and intricate web of interconnected issues, people, and aspects that had to come together in a delicately balanced package (Leonard & Burns, 2006). The relational nature of women's careers seems to persist into midlife, with gender continuing to be interwoven in the business of negotiating home and work life well into midlife (Emslie & Hunt, 2009)

Whilst many of the fears about 'being old' at work may be common across women and men, there do seem to be gender based nuances that could persist into midlife. For example, the kind of work men and women do, sources of meaning, more constraints and barriers (e.g. gendered ageism), a differing shape and trajectory of careers, and potentially different priorities.

5. Knowing if work is fulfilling is largely subjective, a felt sense

If fulfilling work is a 'worthy aspiration for an array of individuals' how does anyone know if their work is fulfilling or not? (Owens, Allan, et al., 2019).

> For many decades, research on the concept of success has largely used quantitative methods to assess the external aspects of success in a male-dominated culture (Borna et al., 2022).

Subjective perceptions dominate for 'fulfilling work' suggesting knowing if work is fulfilling is largely a 'felt-sense'. Several researchers propose measures, based on their definitions, and some have been tested with different populations. It is noticeable that almost all the measures are assessments of perception - in the moment (affective), on reflection (cognitive), or predictively (Allan et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2016; Owens, Allan, et al., 2019).

The PWT uses a number of scales and sub scales, and whilst some factors could be measured 'objectively' (like economic constraints), the majority are based on self-report and perception. Similarly, the Model of Fulfilling Work uses established self-perception measures for each of their four factors – job satisfaction, meaningful work, work engagement, and workplace positive emotions (Allan et al., 2021).

The SBIT of Work does not propose specific measures, using wider empirical research to support components of the theory. They assert that factors including hope, strengths, adaptability, and empowerment may positively influence contextual factors, the work context, and the experience of fulfilling work. Again, these factors typically use perception-based measures.

Of the studies included in this review, half were quantitative and largely asked perception-based questions in surveys. Whilst there are no specific studies into fulfilling work for midlife women, related studies also underline the importance of perception to career satisfaction (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005), work wellbeing (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; McQuaide, 1998b), fulfilment of career dreams (Carr, 1997a), and meaningful work (Kiely, 2000; Still & Timms, 1998).

A career momentum study (for 52 years olds in California) used a mixture of measures including subjective career momentum, status level in work, objective career momentum, family factors, work importance, personality and psychological wellbeing. Whilst this study wasn't specifically about fulfilling work and was based on college educated women only, they did conclude that career momentum cannot be 'reduced to either individual differences in personality traits or life experiences, but rather an integrated set of factors including subjective ones' (Roberts & Friend, 1998).

Several researchers assert that objective assessments are not sufficient to understand the experience of fulfilling work or even the experience of work in midlife, proposing qualitative or mixed methods be used for future research (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; McQuaide, 1998, Borna, 2022). The literature suggests knowing if work is fulfilling (or not) is largely subjective, a felt sense. It is not entirely clear whether this is because of the nature of the concept itself or the nature of how the research was conducted. Given the multiplicity of influencing factors, it does seem reasonable to suggest a holistic assessment or outcome is appropriate – the whole is more than the sum of the parts – as proposed by leading writers in the field in their definitions (Allan et al., 2019, 2021; Duffy et al., 2016; Owens, Allan, et al., 2019)

Conclusion

The five key insights discussed above emerged from the literature and provide potential clues for women themselves and practitioners working with them. In the absence of any definitions of fulfilling work, that have been tested or developed with midlife women, it is challenging to draw too many firm conclusions beyond the insights offered.

The available research does suggest that fulfilling work is possible for mid-life women, but they are likely to face more, and different, challenges compared with men or other women. Decent work can be less readily available due to economic constraints, multiple sources of marginalisation, limited work volition, and restricted career adaptability. Meeting basic psychological needs, particularly survival / power and self-determination needs, may be tougher.

During midlife, biological, psychological, and social factors collide to make it a challenging and disruptive stage. Whilst there has been a notable increase in interest and research into menopause, few women want to defined by this aspect of the midlife transition alone. As the nature of fulfilling work shifts in midlife, fulfilment is pertinent and choices made at this stage can significantly impact future health, wealth, wellbeing and happiness.

Despite midlife women representing an important and sizable population, they are largely neglected by the literature. There is little robust evidence as to what fulfilling work really means to them or what the most important barriers or boosts are. The dominant career models do not seem to fully represent the highly relational nature of women's careers as they continue to negotiate the multiplicity of roles society expects of them.

If fulfilling work is indeed an aspirational outcome available to most people, more work is needed to truly answer the question 'how possible is fulfilling work for midlife women' and provide guidance as to what can help them achieve it.

Future research

Given the absence of directly relevant research, there is real potential for future work. For example, clarifying what fulfilling work means to midlife women would be important foundational work – whether this be a new definition or testing existing definitions with this population. None of the existing models of fulfilling work have been tested with midlife women as yet, and given the potentially unique combination of challenges and constraints, the insight could add to the understanding of practitioners women themselves and practitioners working with them. Finally, identification of the most important boosts and barriers impacting the possibility of fulfilling work for midlife women would help target support for greatest impact.

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Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2024, Issue 53

Career well-being: Practical tools and ideas for organisations to support employees

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5307

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To cite this article:

Mansfield, K. (2024). Career well-being: Practical tools and ideas for organisations to support employees. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 68-79. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5307

Abstract

This article explores the way that career professionals can have career conversations which integrate work and well-being. As the boundaries between work and non-work have become more blurred, it is vital that career professionals and organisations support individuals to take care of themselves and not just to focus on getting and keeping a job. The article considers the published material on the topic of career well-being as well as the research and case studies developed by Career Counselling Services (CCS) through their *Balance* Career Coaching toolkit designed to support the overlapping needs of individuals and employers at work.

Key words: career; wellbeing; work

Introduction

I am writing about this topic from my perspective as a career coach working with individuals and organisations to support them with sustainable career management programmes. The pandemic shone a light on employee wellbeing in an unprecedented way resulting in a fundamental shift in employee attitudes to their emotional, social and physical connection to the workplace. Workplace norms were re-written. In this post-Covid

era of predicted global talent shortages with organisations seeking to capitalise upon the connection between diverse talent and competitive advantage, it has never been more important for employers to respond to the career needs of their employees in a much more holistic way.

At Career Counselling Services (CCS), we define holistic career coaching as a process which enables people to identify and utilise their resources to make career-related decisions and manage career-related issues (Nathan & Hill, 2006). Such holistic career conversations acknowledge the overlap between emotion and life issues and go beyond a traditional career discussion focused on skills, strengths and aspirations. Within such conversations it is important to recognise professional boundaries and to understand that acknowledging the impact of wellbeing on career does not mean that career professionals should stray deeply into life issues for which we may be unqualified and where other specialist help may need to be sought.

There is a shared responsibility for career management between organisations and the individuals who work within them. Employers often request 'self-driven employee career behaviour' as a desired outcome from career development programmes. Yet to make the benefits sustainable, employers must also create environments in which the employee can be pro-active but be supported by managers through easy access to up-to-date information about development and work opportunities. Holistic considerations may be age and gender related and include challenges such as mental and physical health, family, caring responsibilities, neuro-divergency, menopause, bereavement, divorce and more. Managers and career coaches cannot ignore the potential impact of these issues on career well-being, engagement, motivation and performance.

I start with an overview of some of the theories and concepts relating to career well-being before describing CCS's empirical research into this topic and subsequent creation of practical tools to support employers and career coaches to have more meaningful career conversations that pay more attention to contributing factors of career well-being. I illustrate the application of some of the tools in a detailed case study.

Theories and concepts: What is career well-being?

Career well-being is a complex and dynamic construct. The term is often confused with wellness at work initiatives which might offer short term positive benefits to physical and mental health but may neglect more fundamental aspects of career well-being such as opportunities for individuals to use their strengths, to find purpose and meaning in their work and to feel control over how they integrate work and life.

There are very few published studies that directly focus on career well-being as opposed to employee well-being at work. Kidd's (2006; 2008) research is exceptional in its direct use of the term in the academic literature. Seligman's (2011) work on happiness and well-being also makes a significant contribution to our understanding of this area although it does not directly use the term career well-being. Robertson's (2013) work offers an interesting exploration of the concept of career well-being as well as important insights into how

career guidance can positively impact on well-being. Within the context of organisations however, it is Gallup's long-term study of well-being that informs much of what is known about the correlation between higher levels of employee career well-being and its positive impact on organisational outcomes such as higher levels of engagement and retention (Harter et al., 2003).

As Kidd (2006) noted, career well-being has often been conflated in the literature with job satisfaction, yet definitions of job satisfaction seem to overlook the importance of the role of context and social relationships as important contributing factors to career well-being.

Kidd (2008) describes the seven features of career well-being as:

1. career transitions;
2. interpersonal relationships;
3. relationship with the organisation;
4. work performance;
5. sense of purpose;
6. learning and development; and
7. work-life issues

Kidd's research found that career well-being was ultimately 'an ongoing state rather than a discrete outcome' (Kidd, 2008, p.168). The research also considered the facilitators and inhibiting factors in relation to career well-being (see Table 1).

Conditions facilitating career well-being	**Threats to career well-being**
Opportunities for voluntary mobility, successful adjustment to new role	Involuntary mobility, lack of opportunities for mobility, problems adjusting to a new role
Support, feedback and recognition	Interpersonal difficulties, lack of support, feedback or recognition
Autonomy, power	Adapting to organizational change, alienation, inequitable treatment
Using skills, performing well	Dissatisfaction with performance, overload
Purposeful, optimistic orientation	Pessimism, uncertainty about the future
Developing skills	Lack of challenge, lack of opportunities to develop
Work/Life Balance	Difficulties with personal life spilling over into work

Table 1. Kidd's (2008, p.177) facilitators of and threats to career well-being

Some of these can be described as contextual factors that can be positively influenced by organisations, such as the opportunities for mobility, development and support. Others can be seen as factors that the individual can take greater responsibility for such as using their skills, performing well and adapting to change. There is of course an interplay between

the individual and the environmental factors, with the extent to which an individual can fully utilise their skills dependent on contextual opportunities to do so. The descriptions of these facilitators and inhibitors highlight some of the challenges that organisations may face in trying to marry the individual aspects with what the organisation can do. The role of managers is a critical variable between the two for example, that can positively or negatively influence the conditions of well-being.

Seligman (2011, p.15) similarly defined the interplay between context, relationships and individual factors in his work on well-being. He linked well-being to flourishing, which he described as a complex and dynamic construct that is difficult to define and measure. He suggested that it is 'just like the "weather" and "freedom" in its structure: no single measure defines it exhaustively…but several things contribute to it; these are the elements of well-being, and each of the elements is a measurable thing.'

Seligman (2011) identifies five contributing element of well-being which he summarised with the PERMA acronym.

- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishment

This suggests that there are elements that can be positively influenced to support employees to achieve greater levels of career well-being. But what can employers gain from such an investment, and do they have the resources and skills to provide this kind of support?

What is the benefit to organisations of focusing on career well-being?

Much of what we know about career well-being and its link to organisational outcomes stems from scientific analysis of Gallup's annual world poll on well-being; a large, continuous, and diverse survey that includes 160 countries, covering 98% of the world's population since 2008 (Harter et al., 2003). Gallup concur that there is no standard way of measuring well-being and attempt to measure it through five elements: career, social, financial, community and physical wellbeing. Career well-being was found to the most important and the one which impacts most significantly on all the other areas of well-being. For instance, lower career well-being impacts individuals' physical, financial and social well-being.

Gallup define career well-being as '*you like what you do every day*' (Rath & Harter, 2010). The research allowed for broad criteria to acknowledge that 'career' might not occur formally in the workplace, resonating with Arnold's definition of career: 'The sequence of employment related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person' (Arnold, 1997, p16).

The research found that employee groups with higher levels of career well-being offered several benefits to employers including:

- increased productivity and profitability;
- higher levels of employee engagement and retention;
- higher levels of communication; and
- greater alignment between employee strengths and organisational goals.

The Gallup data (Rath & Harter, 2010) offers particularly interesting insights into the relationship between work engagement and well-being. It suggests that employee engagement is the single biggest driver of career well-being, yet higher engagement levels do not necessarily mean employees are thriving at work. Higher levels of work engagement do not prevent burnout and other mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Employees with high engagement and low well-being in their lives are still 61% more likely to suffer burnout. However, where well-being is considered high across the other areas of well-being (outside of work), the benefits of engagement are enhanced.

Of significant note, is Gallup's finding that identifying and harnessing the strengths of employees is a strong component of both engagement and career well-being. Where employees are engaged and thriving from a well-being perspective, and using their strengths, burnout levels are practically non-existent.

Those were reported to be using their strengths were found to be six times as likely to be engaged and more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of career well-being than those who were not. These individuals claimed to work up 40 hours a week and enjoy their work, whilst those who do not have the opportunity to use their strengths reported feeling burned out after just 20 hours of work per week. (Rath & Harter, 2010). Individuals with thriving career well-being were also content with work overlapping with their personal lives and viewed it as almost inevitable.

There seem to be clear benefits for organisations in paying attention to the career well-being needs of its employees yet the reality of operationalising the learning from these studies and concepts and turning them into lived experiences for employees working with organisations presents many challenges.

The rationale for a new approach to career well-being

The complexity of this topic means that for many organisations it is difficult to navigate the practical ways in which they can positively influence the career well-being needs of diverse groups of employees. They may face several barriers in doing so. For example, managers and leaders may not feel that they have the skills or confidence to have career conversations that address these wider holistic issues. It is often easier for managers to focus on performance and avoid conversations that focus on development and career aspiration. As a result, a gap is often reported between well-intentioned talent management programmes and individual career aspirations.

In our (CCS) experience of running career coaching for organisations we have noticed that many individuals who seek career coaching, state a desire or a hope to change their job or career. Often through career coaching it materialises that clients are not unhappy

with the role or career that they have chosen, but rather recognise that they are not paying sufficient attention to the way in which they manage their careers. Some are overly focused on work at the expense of their personal lives. Others are pre-occupied with 'doing a good job' but neglect career behaviours that are important when building a successful organisational career.

The fact that career well-being issues can be addressed through career coaching may raise resourcing issues for some organisations. However, we have found that those organisations that consider ways to develop the skills of those working within organisations as career coaches and which equip line managers with basic career conversation skills see sustainable benefits over time. So, our goal in this project was to create a set of practical career coaching tools that could be used by career coaches working in organisational contexts. The aim will be to help employees to develop a set of effective career management behaviours by enabling them to better navigate organisational careers and recognise the overlap between their own needs and those of their employer. We wanted to develop a questionnaire and tools that would fill the space between the employer's need to maximise productivity and the individual's need to manage their own career needs and well-being.

Underpinning research

Our experience suggested that those individuals who were successful in their careers recognised that in the context of working within an organisation, it was not enough to be good at your job, but instead that there were a set of career behaviours that needed to be cultivated across several key areas. This led us to develop a hypothesis that effective career managers 'balanced' the career needs of their whole selves alongside the needs of their employer as opposed to the over-emphasis of one at the expense of the other.

To test this hypothesis and to inform the design of the tools, we completed empirical research based on qualitative interviews with 40 individuals in mid-career. These interviews explored the factors that participants felt contributed to their career success, what aspects allowed them to thrive at work and how they managed their energy and self-care. The research took place over the course of one year.

Thematic analysis identified key behaviours that were viewed as contributing to successful career management. Key aspects included having a *successful and supportive relationship with a manager* and the need to actively combine good career management with *effective self-care*. This included work-life integration but also importantly how energy resources were channelled at work. The findings concurred with Gallup's research (Rath & Harter, 2010), suggesting that those who were able to use more of their strengths at work, were better satisfied with work-life integration as well as career more generally.

Ultimately the project led to the identification of seven career management factors that could inform the development of the tool. These are set out in Table 2.

Career management factor	Example quotes from the research
Self-Focus – Employer focus	'A manager who encourages you out of your comfort zone, with support' 'Getting constructive feedback' 'Being known for something – standing out because of your commitment to the organisation's values'
Building relationships	'My ability to build relationships'
Career development strategy	'Actively managing career development'
Learning and development	'Putting yourself in learning situations'
Use of personal energy	'Understanding that I need to spend my energy on the things I can control'
Adapting to change	'Being seen as a can-do person'
Work-life balance	'Work smart and force myself to switch off after hours'

Table 2. CCS Balance Career Management Factors and underpinning research insights

Through the analysis of these interviews, we were able to confirm our hypothesis that those who described themselves as thriving in their careers were better able to balance their own needs with those of their employers.

Development of the *Balance* Career Coaching Tools

The seven categories set out in Table 2 were developed into the *CCS Balance Career Management Factors* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The *CCS Balance Career Management Factors*

Within these seven categories, *self-focus versus employer-focus* serves as an umbrella concept. Each category was then developed further with an associated set of career related behaviours underpinning them. From here, a self-scoring behaviourally based questionnaire, the Balance questionnaire was developed allowing individuals to rate which categories they were managing well and those where they may wish to improve.

As an example, I share a resource which provides more information on why the Use of Personal Energy category is important to effective career management and which sets out associated positive behaviours.

Use of Personal Energy
Why is this important?
• Enables an efficient and effective use of personal resources • Gives ideas to use strengths inside and outside of work • Strengthens resolve to decide whether to take on new responsibilities • Can reduce anxiety about things outside of sphere of control
Effective behaviours
• Recognising opportunities that play to strengths • Collaborating with people who raise energy • Doing some self-management activities • Identifying your strengths • Communicating clearly whether now is a good time to take on extra work • Recognising when you are reaching your 'limit'

Figure 2. The use of personal energy

To make the research practical and useful to employers and individuals, a set of 30 career coaching tools were developed. In creating the tools, we sought to connect various theories and approaches with practical application and drew on elements of positive psychology, (strengths), Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) (Grimley, 2007), work engagement and solutions-focused approaches were created across the various categories.

I give a few examples below of some of these tools before illustrating how the tools were practically applied in one case study.

Category	Example of tool	Purpose	Drawing on
Self v Employer Focus	*Aligning your vision with your employer*	To be able to make career and development decisions in line with an employer	CCS research
Building Relationships	*Perceptual Positions*	To encourage an individual to build empathy in managing relationships	NLP
Career Development Strategy	*Writing the next chapter of my career story*	To create a coherent and meaningful future career narrative	Cochrane's (1997) narrative career theory
Learning & Development	*What is my preferred learning style?*	To understand different and preferred ways of learning	Kolb's four learning styles (Loo, 2004)
Use of Personal Energy	*Using my strengths*	To identify opportunities to play to strengths and raise career well-being	Seligman's (2011) positive psychology and Gallup research
Adapting to Change	*Gains and Losses*	To focus on the potential gains of impending organisational change	Kahneman and Tversky's (2013) Prospect Theory
Work-Life Balance	*Work-Life Balance Commandments*	To realise that work life balance is very personally defined. Encourages the individual to define their own 'commandments'	Kirchmeyer's (2000) Work-Life Balance Theory

Table 3. Example tools

The questionnaire and the tools are designed to be used as part of career coaching discussions. We have found that the questionnaire and the tools empower the individual through first recognising patterns in their career management behaviour and then in identifying ways in which they can positively improve this. In turn, this benefits organisations as the outputs can be combined with personal development plans, in-house career conversations, external career coaching and talent management programmes.

An illustration of how the *Balance* career coaching tools can be used

I first describe how Atif presented for career coaching before describing how the career coach used the *Balance* career coaching tools to support him.

Box 1: Case Study – how Atif presented for career coaching

Atif has worked in Financial Audit for the last five years since qualifying. He has very strong business, technical and analytical skills and has good understanding of financial audit methodology. He is very ambitious, would like to become a Senior Audit Manager and has voiced some dissatisfaction that his vertical career is not progressing quickly enough.

He believes that he has met all the technical objectives set and he is beginning to feel demotivated. He is feeling left behind because many of his peers have joined private accountancy firms. He also feels that his manager is not delegating fulfilling projects and work.

He has had some feedback recently that he doesn't come across very confidently or assertively in client meetings and he tends to hesitate or defer when it comes to decision-making about audit judgements. He realises that this behaviour will not help him in his managerial aspirations.

Atif has a young family and works long hours. He has always believed that this will get him 'noticed'. He enjoyed the fact that during the pandemic he got to see more of his family. Now he is expected to travel into the office 4 days a week.

Atif saw an internal career coach, frustrated with his lack of development and feeling quite stuck. The coach had some hunches that there were some underlying issues relating to his perceptions of career success, as well as parental and spousal expectations of how quickly his career should be developing as well as his work-life balance. There was also a sense that he needed support to have a more impactful career conversation with his line manager.

Through skilled listening to define the issues more deeply, the coach was then able to draw on several of the *Balance* tools to help Atif reflect more deeply on what his feelings and concerns really were about his career and to identify some strategies to move forward.

It became clear that Atif had been very focused on a linear career development path and that his frustration in relation to how slow this was, was impacting his confidence. He struggled to associate career with lateral development and his 'tunnel-vision' meant he was missing other opportunities to embrace personal growth.

The coach used the planned happenstance tool, which draws on Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz's (1999) theory which posits that careers are significantly affected by chance events, and that it is important to embrace unexpected opportunities. This approach encourages the cultivation of the skills of curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism and risk-taking to manage careers effectively and cope better with change. The tool encouraged Atif to think about the extent to which he was demonstrating these career skills and how he could develop the competencies further. This helped him to start to see how he could develop within his role and start to build confidence in his ability to influence his own career development more positively.

In Atif's case, there were significant overlapping issues between life and work. Too much energy was both being consumed by activities not playing to his strengths and by the fact that he was spending long days in the office and not seeing his children at the end of day. This was affecting his motivation and enthusiasm.

In the Use of Personal Energy category, a tool drawn from positive psychology called 'Using my strengths' enabled Atif to start to reflect on the activities and skills that really gave him energy and to identify specific projects that he could suggest to his manager he would like to lead on. The tool helped him to recognise the connection between spending time on things that gave him energy and how this would contribute positively to how he was viewed by others.

In the Work-Life Balance category, the 'Work-Life Balance Commandments' tool enabled Atif to identify his dealmakers and dealbreakers when it comes to his own self-care and family life. He was willing to work long hours, but these needed to be far more on his terms. In terms of what made his heart hurt, it was not being able to eat dinner with his children at least every other evening of the week. He was very happy to log on afterwards to complete work if needed but he recognised that he needed to have a conversation with his manager to try to set a new boundary around this and ensure that he would leave the office by 4pm twice a week. His manager was amenable and if anything, liked and respected the more assertive side to Atif sharing what was important to him outside of the workplace.

This approach to career coaching benefitted the organisation as Atif and his manager have now begun a much more open dialogue around career. The focus on his engagement with projects that play to his strengths have resulted in much more positive feedback, which has boosted his confidence. His manager has now started delegating more fulfilling projects to him and has signposted other development opportunities outside of his immediate team as she recognises how valuable he is to the organisation.

Conclusions

The case study demonstrates the practical application of the *Balance* tools in supporting individuals with their career well-being and acknowledges the inevitable overlap between life and work. Through sensitive use of the tools, Atif's career coach created the frame and the environment for a career conversation that enabled Atif to recognise this and to explore his career development in the context of his whole life. This enabled him to identify goals and actions steps that contributed to his career well-being at a much more fundamental, holistic level than would have been possible, had the career conversation focused on his career aspirations alone.

Ultimately, career coaching tools can only be of value to individuals and employers when there is a clear purpose and rationale, and the tools are de-briefed as part of career coaching discussions. The tools were selected with care and purpose by Atif's career coach to address some of the contributing factors to his career issues.

We have found that the questionnaire and tools when used in this manner connects to some of the ideas on career well-being explored in the theories and concepts section, through enabling individuals to reflect on what 'sustains' them and enables them to thrive. For organisations, the tools can help to provide a framework for enabling their employees to thrive by paying attention to environmental factors that impact well-being such as the

role of managers, support and feedback, and opportunities for skills development and the application of strengths.

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Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2024, Issue 53

Article
10.20856/jnicec.5308

Reflections on ethical challenges in green guidance

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To cite this article:

Kavková, E. & Šprlák, T. (2024). Reflections on ethical challenges in green guidance. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 80-88. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5308

Abstract

This article explores the ethical challenges of incorporating 'green guidance' into career counselling. Green guidance was a concept introduced by Peter Plant in 1996 and advocates for the integration of environmental justice and sustainability into career decision-making. This article discusses diverse perspectives on the ethical implications, particularly the balance between impartiality and socio-political responsibilities. Despite some concerns about neutrality, the article argues that career guidance should evolve to prioritise environmental sustainability and client well-being. Practical approaches for integrating green issues into career counselling are suggested, drawing on insights from the 'Exploring Green Guidance' project in Europe. The article concludes that addressing climate change in career guidance is an ethical and practical necessity for future career development.

Key words: green guidance; sustainability; ethical challenges; impartiality; client well-being

Introduction

A profound transformation of our economy is essential if humanity wants to achieve the goals set in the Paris Agreement and mitigate catastrophic consequences of human-induced climate change (United Nations, n.d.). The 'green guidance' movement reflects this reality

and examines how career guidance can address and contribute to mitigating the impacts of climate change. The 'green guidance' approach seeks to develop new practices that promote environmental justice (Plant, 1996). It aims to raise individuals' awareness of the environmental impacts of their professional choices while encouraging practitioners to help clients to make career decisions that contribute to environmental preservation. In this context, career success should be reimagined as incorporating environmental and social considerations alongside economic factors. Green guidance challenges the current growth- and market-focused, and largely Western individualistic, bias in theory and practice and is closely connected to the issue of social justice (Plant, 2020). Since the 1990s there has been a growing body of literature linked to green guidance (for a comprehensive review see Bakke et al., 2024) and the topic has attracted the interest of international organisations such as the OECD (Chang & Mann, 2024).

The scientific evidence demonstrates that climate change is the biggest threat modern humans have ever faced (IPCC, 2022). Climate change is already significantly impacting people's careers. According to a recent international survey among practitioners, 76% agree that helping clients to achieve more environmentally sustainable work and lifestyles should be an objective of career guidance and only 13% raise ethical challenges as a significant obstacle for integrating green guidance into their practice (Hooley et al., 2024). Despite this, objections are sometimes raised when discussing how career guidance practitioners should address the green transition, particularly in relation to the ethical imperative of impartiality.

This article aims to discuss different approaches on the ethical issues related to green guidance, providing some arguments in favour of proactively opening questions of sustainability and green transition with clients. We are drawing from outputs collected by the European *Exploring Green Guidance* project (see www.green-guidance.eu), particularly from a rapid literature review and a survey of the direct experiences of practitioners involved in the project. We are both directly involved in the *Exploring Green Guidance* project which is funded by the European Union and which has stimulated our thinking on this subject. This text is not a scientific article, but a reflection based on our experience which aims to provide some stimulus for further discussion. The examples we use do not reflect the full range of literature that exists on the topic. We selected those that we found thought-provoking both for the context of our project and for the readers of this article.

Different approaches to ethical issues in current literature

There are several points of view on the ethical principles that should be adopted by career guidance professionals. Several authors point out the necessity of such practitioners adopting a *socio-political commitment* and making use of the tools of critical psychology to question the role of research and practice in maintaining oppression and social injustices (Pouyaud & Cohen-Scali, 2016). They call for an immediate commitment to resolving multidimensional crises (Guichard, 2016) and invite researchers and practitioners to become political actors to promote social justice and sustainable development and 'think more deeply about whose interests we serve, what it is we should be seeking to achieve for the individual and society, and what contribution we can make in relation to a "green" justice future, and present' (Roe, 2020), thus questioning the dominant mechanisms within society (Carosin & Canzittu, 2021). Guichard (2016) suggests we fundamentally rethink the role of guidance practice by asking a rhetorical question: *Will we continue to collaborate in*

supporting the forms of work that undermine the future of the planet? Or can we promote the creation of active life forms that lead to sustainable development by decent human activities? Such critical thinking suggests that career guidance practitioners should shift their focus from merely facilitating individuals' integration into the existing world, towards actively contributing to its transformation.

Some authors propose a *change of paradigm* for career guidance (Plant, 2020) and suggest fundamentally rethinking guidance practice to ensure its full participation in the development of social justice and climate transition, as well as in educating individuals about climate change. This involves analysing the extent to which individuals' vocational behaviour impacts collective well-being and encouraging clients to consider the consequences of their choices on others and the world, 'even if it means sacrificing the neutrality and impartiality of the guidance process' (Masdonati & Rossier, 2021, p.280). These perspectives emphasise the importance of discussing both individual and collective well-being in career decision-making (Pouyaud & Cohen-Scali, 2016).

Some argue that the fact that guidance professionals introduce the question of 'the needs of the world' in their dialogue with clients, *does not significantly alter the underlying paradigm*. Instead, it merely adds another topic for discussion alongside interests, values, competencies, and other decision-making factors (Rochat, 2021). Transitioning towards green guidance thus entails an ethical commitment to consistently consider these aspects in client interactions, without necessitating a fundamental overhaul of their skills and practice. Rochat argues that, in light of the pressing climatic and social challenges, it is imperative to systematically integrate ecological and human considerations into career guidance processes.

An alternative approach to the issue considers the green transition as an integral aspect of professional life (Hooley, 2022); 'an increasing number of clients are likely to proactively raise concerns about the environment', requiring guidance practitioners to address these concerns and proactively introduce the ecological transition 'as a key contextual issue that is shaping career development'. This perspective posits that considering the ecological transition in career choices extends beyond selecting 'green jobs' and recognises that 'all professions have an environmental impact' and that 'organisations of all types are under pressure for change'. Consequently, guidance practitioners are encouraged to view the ecological transition as permeating the entire professional sphere. Their mission includes guiding individuals through a societal transformation that significantly impacts professional lives and working environments.

Ethical challenges for green practice

As we've already mentioned, some practitioners view climate change and sustainability as politically engaged topics and therefore unacceptable for ethical guidance practice. The requirement for impartiality is relevant. As Hooley (2023) points out, there is often a more or less explicit practical and ideological bias that stems from the organisation practitioners work for, their sources of funding and the objectives of the service they provide. Impartiality is important when a career guidance practitioner must define him or herself against policies promoting certain types of education or professions which may, for example, seek to address current labour shortages in certain sectors. But if career

guidance practitioners are to remain credible, they cannot simply promote government priorities regardless of the interests of the individual. Impartiality also ensures that the practitioner will respect the client's beliefs and and convictions about what the best career path is for them. This is especially important in a multicultural environment where people have different life patterns and expectations.

Achieving absolute impartiality in guidance practice is not always possible or even desirable. Some guidance practice does not seek to be impartial, for example practitioners are happy to discuss and advocate against gender segregation of the labour market, educate clients about the gender pay gap, and help those who are being discriminated against. We also recognise ethical tensions within individual (or group) counselling and coaching between impartiality and the requirement to act in the best interests of the client, which is a common element of many codes of ethics (CDI, 2018, NCDA, 2015, CDANZ, 2021).

It is in the clients' best interest to have up-to-date information on the labour market and to know what the future trends are. They can thus better prepare themselves for the changes that await them at a workplace (whether due to automation, environmental changes or any other factors). They can develop competences that will be needed in the future to gain and maintain decent employment. It costs time and money to acquire necessary qualifications and gain appropriate experience, which is why such information is vital for clients in making decisions about their future career paths.

There is a vast number of studies and publications on the future of the labour market and which set out forecasts of what jobs will be available in the next 5 or 10 years (CERIC, 2023; Dickerson et al., 2023; Tytler et al., 2019; World Economic Forum, 2023;). Many of these forecasts highlight environmental change and the need for substantial shifts in the labour market to address climate change. It is one of the duties of the career guidance practitioner to provide information drawing on these; to actively obtain them and to educate themselves in this area (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2021).

The growing green sector and the job opportunities associated with it are an integral part of the LMI that a career practitioner should provide. Bal (2023) states,

> It is not always easy to anticipate the skills demand of rapidly growing or new technological areas. A current example is the green and sustainability industry. As technology develops and new tech is introduced, demands for skills can suddenly change very rapidly… But with the green industry of the future, we know we will need engineers and technology experts, some in fields that are not yet fully developed. This means that some training needs, even in highly technological industries, can be anticipated. (p.15)

The LMI dimension of career guidance is value-neutral and therefore should be theoretically unassailable.

If we think (and act) in relation to a broader context of our work and consider social and social justice aspects, we are again skating on the thin ice of an ethical breach. Addressing systemic inequalities (socioeconomic barriers, racial, ethnic and gender discrimination, etc.) may often require practitioners to engage in advocacy. Yet, advocating for a client's rights or interests might be seen by some as in conflict with the desire to be impartial.

Nevertheless, it is important to bring the topic of social justice into the green guidance debate because climate change is deeply intertwined with global patterns of inequality. The poorest and most vulnerable people bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change yet contribute the least to the crisis (World Bank, 2023, Islam, Winkel, 2017). Although equality and non-discrimination are covered in several codes of ethics (CDI, 2018, AGCAS, n.d.), the topic of social justice (of which equality and non-discrimination are an integral part) is considered by some practitioners to be political and therefore breaking their commitment to impartiality.

The IAEVG Ethical Guidelines (2017) offers us a different perspective.

> The counsellor shall continually reflect in his or her practice the humanistic principles that underpin ethical conduct and take into account changing social and political issues that have ethical implications for practice. How should educational and career counselling services ethically respond to the global tension between economic and environmental issues in clients' work lives and workplaces?

A further conflict of ethical principles entails the requirement to have the best interests and welfare of clients and their development in mind (CDANZ, 2021, NCDA, 2015, CDI, 2018). It is in everyone's undeniable best interest to live on a planet where the threat of ecological collapse does not hang over us, where we are not exposed to extreme weather events, where we can breathe healthy air and drink unpolluted water. We all have to do our part and work hard to ensure that our planet does not collapse. One way to do it is to make (appropriate) green career choices.

Ideas for green practice

If, as we argue, the historic attachment to the ill-defined notions of neutrality and impartiality should not discourage practitioners' active engagement with issues of sustainability and climate change in their discussions with clients, the question is how to do it? How can practitioners relate to clients around green issues without eliciting perplexity and resistance? Here are some ideas generated in course of the *Exploring Green Guidance* project about what green career guidance could be:

The current liberal narrative may have reached its limits in putting individual needs, desires and wants at the centre of attention without considering the needs of others, including future generations. One of the ways to explore is to take the *needs of the world as a point of departure of careers services*. Some authors justify this ethical stance by pointing out the difference between 'hedonic' well-being (search for pleasure and avoidance of suffering) and 'eudaimonic' well-being (engagement in activities that are meaningful both psychologically and socially), which entails that individual happiness cannot be achieved at the expense of others, i.e. future generations and environment (Rochat, 2021). Practitioners can help their clients achieve both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being by bringing forward their connection to the world and the inevitable moral imperative of sustainability.

This can be the perspective applied in the guidance process during the contracting phase and can be explored further through various activities, such as the Sustainable Career Card Sort (Rochat & Masdonati, 2019) as part of a wider discussion about values. Conversations around clients' values are an integral part of the career guidance process and questions

around sustainability can be introduced into these conversations naturally. This can be done without imposing these topics, but opening them in a language that is natural to clients and in a way that is connected to their situation, e.g. What are the problems and challenges of the world that touch you on an emotional level? What problems of the world, society or your community, would you like to contribute to solving? Which values do you want to pass on to young people? What change would you like to bring to this world? What traces do you want to leave behind on this planet? Which companies, sectors, occupations, businesses or technologies can help you achieve this? Where can you find them? Often using neutral language and words like sustainability, nature, animals, plants, earth, planet can be more useful than using words like 'ecology', 'climate change' and so on, as these have become politically loaded for some people.

The conversation should focus on how clients see the world, how their work can affect the environment in the future. The outcome of such practice will not be that all the clients get a green job or engage in education or training in an area directly linked to green transition, although these options can be proactively proposed and explored. Clients can be helped in exploring how their current work can become 'greener' (for example, 'You work in a factory, what can you specifically do there to make it greener?'). Inviting clients to talk more about their concerns related to the economic transformation can also be a way of better understanding what this issue means for them and propose follow-up questions, identify their drivers, and their expectations to better connect with them.

Another very practical option is to introduce sustainability as one of the choice criteria when choosing a career, education or training opportunity, employment or company using different tools such as cards, tables of decision making, list of criteria and prioritisation.

Conclusion

Climate change is a scientific fact, and saving our planet is not a matter of politics, but of survival. It is therefore in everyone's best interest to help avert an environmental and related humanitarian catastrophe. Both on a personal level (e.g. in trying to consume sustainably) and a professional level (e.g. in seeking green jobs and trying to green your existing job or career).

Career practitioners have an important role to play in this process, as they can show their clients the way towards sustainable employment at the professional level. Unfortunately, climate change is a highly politicised issue and thus presents career practitioners with a false dilemma through the ethical requirement for neutrality. However, we would argue that the survival of humanity is neither right nor left wing.

If facts and information about climate change alone cannot change careers practitioners' attitude or alleviate their concerns about unethical behaviour, the very source of these concerns, the codes of ethics, can be used to help them to think these issues through. There are several principles in them that contradict the narrowly conceived principle of neutrality, which we have discussed in this article, notably the commitments to the provision of accurate information, the directive to act in the best interest of the client and the desire to support social justice. If we want to act in accordance with them, we need to integrate the topic of sustainability into our career practice.

We thus find ourselves in the situation of an ethical clash. In theory, all ethical principles are equal. In reality some are seen as being more important than others, depending on the priorities and situation of each practitioner. The clashes between different ethical imperatives mean that it is our professional duty to reflect upon these ethical clashes as we try to resolve them. We have to be perfectly clear about our priorities and be aware of impacts and consequences of our ethical decisions, based upon those priorities. Ultimately, we would argue that neither contemporary career theories nor codes of ethics prohibit us from providing green guidance.

Other issues related to green guidance require further reflection that is outside of the scope of this article. Practitioners and policy makers have to be aware of the risk of green guidance becoming one of the subtle forms of greenwashing. In this regard, the 4-field analysis model of Packer (2019) which distinguishes between radical, progressive, conservative and liberal approaches may be useful for developing the reflexivity of practitioners. Another issue is the link between sustainability (in a larger sense) and social justice, where the gradual model of Masdonati and Rossier (2021) which differentiates between decent work, dignity, sustainable career and ethical imperatives can be useful. But in this article, we stipulate that the ethical imperative of impartiality is not and should not be an obstacle for integrating green guidance into practice.

The debate about the role of guidance professionals and career change should move forward and focus on practical questions of the effective implementation of green guidance into our daily practice. We have outlined some ideas about connecting with clients and opening these issues with them. More research and work is necessary to develop effective tools that help people to address questions of sustainability through their career decision making, explore opportunities for more sustainable forms of life, better manage their engagement in the green transition and deal with the emotional and psychological issues raised by environmental change. Supporting resources are also needed to help practitioners develop a green understanding of the labour market. These resources need to recognise that there are a range of different ways to 'do' green guidance in a variety of delivery contexts. Through this article we hope we have encouraged guidance practitioners to experiment with opening these issues with their clients as an important first step in the journey of 'greening' the careers sector.

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Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2024, Issue 53

Article
10.20856/jnicec.5309

How green is your practice? A process for auditing and reimagining career guidance practice for a greener world

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To cite this article:

Grant, K. (2024). How green is your practice? A process for auditing and reimagining career guidance practice for a greener world. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 89-104. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5309

Abstract

This article outlines a method to aid career development professionals in addressing environmental issues through their practice. It is based on a workshop of the same title delivered at the NICEC conference on Career and Sustainability. The result is a facilitated process which supports practitioners to collectively reflect on current practice, acknowledge existing positions, discuss concerns and imagine new, 'greener' practice. The workshop takes practitioners through three stages: 1) Audit; 2) Challenges; and 3) Stimulus for change, making use of established typologies of practice and more recent explorations of social justice in career guidance. The audit stage employs Tony Watts' typology of guidance ideologies to assess practitioners' current positions and consider criteria for future provision. The five signposts of emancipatory career guidance is proposed as an impetus for the creation of new practice. The workshop is presented here as a tool for others to use and consider.

Key words: career guidance; green guidance; practice; climate change; career development practitioners

Introduction

The climate crisis is recognised as a critical issue as it poses significant threats to global ecosystems, human health, and economic stability. International organisations such as the United Nations (n.d.), the World Health Organisation (n.d.) and Greenpeace (n.d.) each emphasise the urgency of addressing climate change to prevent catastrophic impacts on biodiversity, health and to ensure sustainable development. In recent years concerns about climate change have provoked direct action from groups of young people via the school strike for climate (Fridays for Future, n.d.), and from activists such as Just Stop Oil (n.d.) and Extinction Rebellion (n.d.). There has also been pressure on businesses and organisations to declare NetZero targets and develop sustainability plans (UK Government 2023, Whittingham, 2023).

Clearly there are good reasons to be concerned about our natural world and to consider what we can do to protect it. For many of us this comes in the form of individual choices about how we live our lives, spend our time and for whom we vote. This article argues that as career development professionals we may also have a role to play and outlines a method for exploring our current practice and stimulating conscious inclusion of environmental concerns in our work.

What does climate change have to do with career guidance?

There are a number of reasons to consider the 'green-ness' of our career guidance work. The most obvious is the impact it does and will have on a key area for our work – the labour market. In 2020 the UK government set up the 'Green Jobs Taskforce', as part of a ten-point plan for a green industrial revolution (UK Government, n.d.-b) The report from this taskforce concluded that 'Achieving net zero by 2050 will require a system-wide transformation of the economy; most occupations, to varying extents, will become green' (UK Government, 2021, p 6). In his presentation to the NICEC conference, Chris Warhurst (2024) updated us on changes to date. According to his research, 40% of all job vacancies could in some way be classified as 'green jobs'. A mere 4% of these can be classed as new roles whereas the majority (26%) are in existing jobs that require enhanced skills or knowledge (for example skills needed to transition to the maintenance of electric cars). The remaining 10% are pre-existing jobs that have increased in demand as a result of a green investment or initiative (for example people involved in the transport of sustainable energy materials).

As career development professionals we regularly act as key intermediaries to the labour market with our clients. Being knowledgeable about trends and upcoming changes helps us to support our clients in their careers and green labour market information is no exception. More work is needed to uncover the impact of net zero targets on the labour market. In the UK responsibility for some of this is in the hands of the 'Green Jobs Delivery Group' (UK Government, n.d.-a), indicating the import placed on jobs to achieve sustainability goals.

It is also evident that climate change is important to the people we work with. Whether you work with younger, mid-life or older people there is evidence to suggest that people of all generations are concerned and engaged (Ritchie, 2024). The 2021 UNICEF survey on childhood establishes the high level of importance younger people place on climate change.

My own research (2023) focused on individuals in mid-career and found that 79 of the 80 respondents felt it was important that we work to address climate change. And a recent survey of 674 career development practitioners revealed that the overwhelming majority see climate change as urgent and important (Hooley et al., 2024).

Recent years have seen several researchers and practitioners explore sustainability and career guidance (Bakke et al., 2024, Di Fabio & Bucci, 2016; Dimsits, 2021; Green Guidance, 2024; Hooley, 2022; Mowforth, 2023; Plant, 2020; Winter, 2023). Studies often focus on the delivery of information, advice, and guidance about 'green careers' (and the nature and value of these careers) and consider the complications that may arise from a 'green guidance' approach (as well as the risks of not applying it). Other studies examine and suggest ways that we can embed sustainability into education (Advance HE, 2014), including programmes focused on students' employability (Ho, 2023, Winfield & Ndlovu, 2019).

The recent NICEC conference which stimulated this issue of the NICEC journal demonstrated the level of interest in the topic for the sector. Yet, when it comes to career guidance much of the work to date has remained fairly theoretical with relatively little practical exposition. Research outlined above appears to demonstrate agreement that climate crisis is an important issue for us, for the labour market and for our clients. What is unclear is what role career development practitioners play in this challenge. Researchers and practitioners have shown interest in this area however few have found paths to address this issue in day-to-day career guidance practice.

A process for moving forward

Building on existing studies and my own research, I developed a workshop titled 'How green is your practice?' with the aim of identifying practical next steps. I imagined the workshop as a facilitated process that would support practitioners to collectively reflect on current practice, acknowledge existing positions, discuss concerns and challenges, and imagine new 'greener' practice. The workshop was delivered to a small group at the NICEC conference in July 2024. Participants were informed of my intention to learn from and gather ideas from the experience, which I hoped to share following the conference. The workshop has since been iterated and developed into the format provided in this article. I thank the participants at the NICEC workshop for helping me to explore the process and learn from that experience.

The process suggests three stages: 1) Audit; 2) Challenges; and 3) Stimulus for change. Below I outline the three stages and explain how I draw on existing perspectives and models to support the exploration and creation of greener practice. The process and thinking behind the workshop is presented here to allow others involved in the training, development and support of careers professionals, or those who work in practice themselves, to use and adapt it. I invite readers to engage in the process as though they were a participant, while also providing details about the experience of conducting such a workshop. An outline of the workshop plan is provided at the end of the article and slides with sample resources are available by contacting me.

Stage 1: Auditing current practice

It is useful to consider our current practice and identify where this sits in terms of its potential to introduce and/or address climate change issues. Acknowledging our current position gives us the opportunity to speak openly about what we do, why we do it and the challenges we may face. To do this in the workshop I began by asking participants to list a few common activities that they use in their current practice. This might include, for example, a careers fair, a one-to-one career guidance session, a skills workshop, a CV building session or perhaps careers education embedded in curriculum. It is important that participants are able to list as many types of practice as they wish to and provide a small amount of detail for each, such as the aim, target groups and key resources used. All activities are valid and welcome and there is no expectation that the practice shared will relate to the environment, though these are welcome too! Examples of current practice can be shared using post it notes or anonymously using a platform such as Menti or Padlet (for example).

Once examples have been surfaced they can be used to examine these practices in terms of their capacity to deliver 'green guidance'. To support this process we employ Tony Watts' socio-political ideologies of guidance (1996). This typology divides career guidance practice according to where the activity is focused (society or the individual) and on whether the activity aims to affect change or not. The result suggests that there are four ideologies or approaches to guidance, namely; conservative; liberal; progressive and radical.

The bottom half of the matrix represents approaches that aim to maintain the status quo or present the world as it is today. The top half represents approaches that aim to affect change or present that world as it might possible be. The left side represents acivities that focus on groups, systems or society, whilst the right side represents those that focus on the needs of individuals. The different ideologies are represented in a 2 x 2 matrix as seen in Figure 1 below.

	Focused on society/groups/systems	**Focused on the individual**
Support change, challenge status quo **Dark Green**	**Radical** • Practice advocates for social change • Addresses ecological issues	**Progressive** • Practice advocates for individual change • Addresses ecological issues
Maintain status quo **Light Green**	**Conservative** • Practice advocates for social control and ecological norms	**Liberal** • Practice is non-directive, protecting individual freedom and ecological norm

Figure 1. Tony Watts' socio-political ideologies of guidance - incorporating Packer's (introduced by Plant, 2020) green lens.

In 2019, Packer (introduced by Plant, 2020) reimagined Watts' typology by adding an environmental aspect. In Packer's version she differentiates between 'light green' and 'dark green' approaches to careers practice with dark green signifiying practice that is open to change and working to address ecological issues (sitting in the top half of the matrix). Light

green would include practice that does not seek out opportunities to address environmental issues (sitting in the bottom half of the matrix).

The argument put forward by both Watts (1996) and Packer is that practice labelled as conservative or liberal would do little to support or address change in the world. When it comes to addressing a complex problem like climate change it is clear that there are limitations to working in those conservative or liberal spaces. Taking an individualistic or static approach will not address the needs of a world experiencing severe flooding, drought, wildfires and an energy crisis. As we often hear in protests, it's system change ('*not climate change!*') that is needed. Those two words – 'system' and 'change' embody the nature of the top half of the matrix in Watts' model. It follows that, in terms of greening our practice, we would want to see more practice in the radical and progressive spaces.

Using the dimensions in the combined matrix we can audit our practice and identify where it currently sits. Begin by choosing a few examples of practice collected earlier. For each activity we ask four questions:

1. *Does the activity aim to support/develop groups or individuals?*

   (Groups = left side of the matrix, Individual = right side of the matrix)

2. *Does the activity aim to help learners to access existing opportunities through established pathways? Does it present the world only as it is today?*

   (Yes = bottom of the matrix)

3. *Does the activity aim to help learners to question or challenge the existing opportunities and established pathways? Does it present the world as it might be?*

   (Yes = top of the matrix)

4. *Does the activity include content that links to climate change or environmental sustainability?*

   (Yes = radical or progressive, dark green, top of the matrix, No = conservative or liberal, light green, bottom of the matrix)

The answers to these questions help to guide us (individually or collectively) in mapping our practice onto the matrix. Note that this is not an exact science. Some activities fall in between places on the grid or can be different depending on the cohort, practitioner, employer involved etc. For example, we could argue that a careers fair aims to help individuals access existing opportunities through established pathways. This would probably mean we would place it in or at least near the 'liberal' approach. But perhaps at this careers fair there are a group of employers who have been invited because they are showcasing new sustainability roles or every employer has been given the chance to share their sustainability credentials at their stand. If so, it would be possible to argue that this particular careers fair sits in a more 'progressive' practice space. The table below (see figure 2) represents the key criteria within Watts' and Packer's matrix.

	Focused on society/groups/systems	**Focused on the individual**
Support change, challenge status quo **Dark Green**	**Radical Practice** ✓ Aims to support, develop or protect groups of people, systems, employers… ✓ Aims to help learners to question or challenge existing opportunities and established pathways ✓ Presents the world as it might be Includes content that links to climate change or environmental sustainability	**Progressive Practice** ✓ Aims to support, develop or protect individuals ✓ Aims to help learners to question or challenge existing opportunities and established pathways ✓ Presents the world as it might be Includes content that links to climate change or environmental sustainabilities
Maintain status quo **Light Green**	**Conservative Practice** ✓ Aims to support, develop or protect groups of people, systems, employers… ✓ Aims to help learners to access existing opportunities through established pathways ✓ Presents the world as it is today ✓ Not focused on environmental issues	**Liberal Practice** ✓ Aims to support, develop or protect individuals ✓ Aims to help learners to access existing opportunities through established pathways ✓ Presents the world as it is today ✓ Not focused on environmental issues

Figure 2. Criteria for auditing practice

There is value in talking about the difficulty of identifying where we think our practice sits. Collective discussion and decision making is important at this stage. For the workshop I recommend completing a couple of examples as a collective group first. Then participants can be tasked to work with a partner or in small groups to analyse and situate their own examples on the matrix. It is important that participants see that this is not always an easy process and that it is reasonable for there to be more than one answer. The aim is that participants benefit from the process of auditing their practice within a community of their peers.

It is equally important to take time to observe and share the results of the mapping exercise. Where does much of our practice currently sit? Why? Taking some time to reflect on the results is helpful to the next stage and will likely prompt further discussion of key issues.

Stage 2: Acknowledge challenges and barriers

The audit stage asks us to take a critical view of our practice. This process will kick off some initial thinking about how activities might be modified, what that might look like, could it even be achieved? At this second stage it is useful to openly acknowledge and discuss the challenges and barriers that we might encounter. Ask individuals to share their

concerns in pairs or small groups initially. Then ask that the challenges are shared with the whole group for open discussion. This can be done either with each group speaking out or responses collected anonymously, again using an online platform of your choice.

Many of the concerns will warrant and benefit from collective discussion. Some challenges represent a bigger barrier than others and the size of that barrier will depend on individual perspectives, experiences and organisational context. Below are some key themes that came from participants at the NICEC workshop, coupled with results from my research with learners (2023). For each concern a counterpoint is provided, most of which have come from workshop participants as they raised, discussed and made arguments for and against the different issues.

- **Remaining impartial and client centred:** There is a potential tension between being client centred and taking a radical or progressive approach. How do we honour the needs of individuals and remain impartial and non-judgmental? What impact might this have on professional standards?

  Our ability to be impartial is not absolute. Hooley's (2023) critical review of impartiality provides useful discussion points on contesting impartiality in careers work.

- **Careers work is not political work:** Some may feel there is a risk of activities becoming too political. This could alienate some clients and learners or simply turn off others.

  Watts' model itself suggests that in whatever work you do, you occupy a socio-political ideology, meaning political stances are ever-present, though not always acknowledged.

- **Practitioner confidence:** Career development professionals are experts in their field but not necessarily confident in their knowledge and skills related to environmental concerns, sustainability and changes in the labour market as a result of net zero targets.

  The need for more training and support for practitioners has been established recently via the survey undertaken as part of the Exploring Green Guidance project (Hooley et al., 2024). A discussion about training and development needs can reveal sources of support and existing knowledge or experience in this arena.

- **Pressure to be results oriented:** Many practitioners have direct or indirect demands to meet recruitment targets and to do work that will improve clients' destinations, such as graduate outcomes or moving on to a new role successfully, regardless of environmental issues.

  Sustainability features in many core career exploration topics (e.g. relating information about the labour market, exploring individuals' values, beliefs and skills and considering future steps) and 'good' results my be achieved by taking this into account. Winfield and Ndlovu's examination of embedding sustainability into a business school programme (2019) may even indicate improved employability as a result. Furthermore, organisations that career development practitioners work with and within are likely to have targets that link to net zero emissions and the United Nations Sustainability Goals (n.d.).

- **Stakeholder perspectives:** We work in partnership with employers and have the interests of our learners and clients at the heart of our work. Some may not agree with a more radical or progressive approach. How can we continue to have positive

relationships with employers? Do our clients want this? Will this affect our business? How do we consider the many different aspects and potential barriers affecting our learners/clients such as internationalisation and socio-economic status.

Stakeholder engagement is an important element in career development practitioners work. The counterpoint to this concern will differ depending on the nature of our relationships and the various power dynamics involved. It is perhaps useful to be reminded of the various sources of evidence that demonstrate the importance that people place on environmental issues (Bakke et al, 2024, Ritchie, 2024). An understanding of Patton and McMahon's systems theory framework (2021) is also potentially useful here as we attempt to navigate the inter-related factors and influences affecting individuals in their careers – and this links well with the consideration of the ways in which our economy and labour market systems affect those of our natural world.

The concerns above are important and valid. In the workshop it is beneficial to take time to consider them and encourage wide discussion. The counterpoints provided above can support further exploration. This exploration need not be limited to the workshop model suggested here. Readers can employ the mapping process or this article as a prompt for peer discussion, reflection and consultation with colleagues to help identify challenges and issues.

At the end of Stage two we need to be able to make the case that, despite our concerns, it is worth exploring new greener practice. Participants who willingly attend a 'How green is your practice?' workshop are likely to have some investment in this already and will be able to help make this case effectively. A key argument comes from the core of career development work – the labour market itself. Net zero initiatives are clearly linked to the economy and changes to the labour market (UK Government n.d.-b, Warhurst, 2024). This on its own provides a strong argument to counter some of the above concerns. We have a duty to our clients to endeavour to understand and represent labour market changes and trends in our work. Additionally, we know that most individuals, including career development practitioners themselves, view climate change as an urgent and important issue (Hooley et al., 2024, Ritchie, 2024). Whilst this does not mean that the challenges and barriers disappear, it presents an argument for continuing with the process.

Stage 3: A stimulus for change

The next stage involves imagining new practice. The aim will be to move practice closer to or into the radical and/or progressive spaces by modifying existing practice or to create a new activity that meets a need in a radical or progressive way. The aim is not necessarily to be operating exclusively in radical and progressive approaches; there may be very good arguments for us to be working in conservative and liberal spaces as well.

To support the greening of our practice we introduce a stimulus; I have used the 'five signposts of emancipatory career guidance' (Hooley et al., 2021). The five signposts offer five different methods (signposts) for career development practitioners to create career guidance activities that are consciously anti-discriminatory and challenge the status quo. These principles are useful to apply to develop practice that is consciously working in progressive or radical spaces and which encourages engagement with environmental issues – thus the signposts can provide an impetus for greening our practice. In this workshop the five signposts can act as a challenge to normative practice.

Below I have outlined the nature and rationale behind each of the signposts. The explanation illustrates how the individual signpost offers an impetus for us to consider our approach and to create career guidance activities that address issues such as climate change. Within the table I have provided one example of a possible green career guidance activity that could be delivered in practice. These are drawn together from my experience, suggestions gathered in the workshop and existing practice. A full description of the activity and the resources linked to each of the examples are listed in the section below figure 3.

Five signposts	Explanation	Example
1. Build critical consciousness	• Helps people to understand the world as it is • Thinking about why things are organised the way they are. Who benefits from not addressing climate change? • Consider what can be changed and how **Rationale:** Whilst we may not be able to fix climate change immediately, we can begin the process by identifying where we want change to happen and why.	Greenwashing and my career
2. Name oppression	• Oppression acts against those who are oppressed and favours those who benefit from the oppression • Oppression can come in different forms: Exploitation, powerlessness, oil and gas interests, unequal impact of climate change on vulnerable population, cultural imperialism, violence (i.e. physical, verbal or the result of natural disasters linked to severe weather) **Rationale:** Naming oppression can be empowering. It gives permission to discuss concerns and acknowledge experiences of the oppressed.	Fossil free careers debate
3. Question what is normal	• Societies and culture define what we assume is normal and natural • This includes what we consider to be a good career, a life well lived, a sustainable world etc. • What is seen as normal can also vary for different kinds of people **Rationale:** By questioning norms we can ask why it is normal and open up new and different possibilities.	How green is that job?
4. Encourage people to work together	• Career is not an individual activity, it is something we do with others • We pursue our career alongside others, sometimes co-operating, sometimes competing, sometimes advocating (likewise our pursuit of a sustainable natural world) • Strategies for developing your career can be collective and individual (likewise strategies for addressing climate change) **Rationale:** recognising the importance of co-operation and collective action can open up new learning opportunities.	World at Work: A collaborative board game experience
5. Work at a range of levels	• Our careers take place at a range of levels (within ourselves, our families, our employers/workplaces, our communities, our environment, our political systems etc). • Might include providing feedback into the system and/or advocating for others **Rationale:** our work as career development practitioners can mean working in different spaces to support clients and address needs.	Sustainable internship and placement programme

Figure 3: Five Signposts of Emancipatory Career Guidance (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2021) and examples of ideas for progressive or radical practice

Examples of greener (progressive or radical) practice and linked resources

Signpost 1 - Build critical consciousness: Greenwashing and my career

This workshop aims to help individuals to work together to identify the hallmarks of green washing, apply what they have learned and consider what this may mean for their career planning.

The design assumes a group of 10-15 participants and can be modified for larger groups. Learners are collected into 2-3 groups with each group tasked with investigating one resource on the topic of green washing (see below). Each group is asked to summarise the lessons learned from their resource and share this with the wider audience. Together workshop participants agree on their key learnings and prepare a collective 'Is it greenwashing?' checklist.

Participants are then asked to pair up and investigate 1-2 employer profiles and make use of the newly created resource. Employer profiles can be selected in advance or chosen by workshop participants. Pairs can share what they have learned with the wider group in a plenary session.

The final part of the workshop asks participants to reflect on what they have learned and how this may relate to their career planning and research.

Resources useful to this may include:

- University College of Estate Management's article on how to spot greenwashing (2024)
- BBC's Seven ways to spot businesses greenwashing (2021)
- WWF Guide to Greenwashing (n.d.)

Signpost 2 - Name oppression: Fossil free careers debate

Introduce and debate People and Planet's Fossil Free careers campaign (2024) and the role that organisations and businesses play in climate change and net zero targets. This can be done in a large or small group session.

People and Planet have resources available to support this debate on their website (2024). There are also articles to be found online about the campaign and related ideas about fossil free careers which could be used as prompts for a debate.

Signpost 3- Question what is normal: How green is that job?

Learners are tasked with researching two (or more) organisations using sources of green LMI to compare and contrast their sustainability records. Learners critically reflect on their learning and on the LMI available. Resources useful to this may include:

- Nesta's 'How green is your job really?' (2021) Green Jobs Explorer which has used AI to analyse 4 million job adverts and examined industry emissions data to attempt to gauge the greenness of different occupations.
- Access and compare difference company sustainability profiles on CSR Windo (2024)
- Netzero Tracker (2024) offer an overview of the 2,000 largest publicly-traded companies and analyse the key components of their net zero target(s).

Signpost 4 - Encourage people to work together: World at Work: A collaborative board game

This board game asks participants to work collaboratively to protect workers in their 'town' from harm and realise a sustainable economy. Players make collective decisions with the aim of collecting social benefits (e.g. universal basic income, taxes raised from fossil fuel use) that will improve the lives of everyone living and working in their town. More information about how the game works and who to contact for more information can be found on the Career Guidance and Social Justice Blog (Grant, 2024).

Signpost 5 - Work at a range of levels: Sustainable internship and placement programme

Employer engagement teams work to create internship and placement programmes and roles that focus on sustainability and positive impact on environmental issues. This work might involve influencing change and feeding into systems at different levels. For example: students, employer engagement colleagues, enterprise colleagues, placement team members, employers, university systems, senior leadership and funding bodies. Resources to support this work and learn about similar projects (some in the USA) include:

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Green Jobs for Nature (2022)
- Green Jobs Network. (n.d.) (including The Green Jobs Pod)
- Green internship scheme from Zero Waste Scotland (n.d.)
- Internship programme examples from the Go Green Initiative (n.d.)

Conclusion

This piece has attempted to build on the existing work that has been undertaken on green guidance and sustainability in education and careers work. I have presented a process that aims to help move practitioners (if only a little) from the more abstract space of *'I would like to do something, but I am not sure how'* to a practical, collaborative and creative space of '*we can see some different approaches that help us to talk about climate change and career'*. The three-stage process is supported by Tony Watts' socio-political ideologies matrix (1996) and the five signposts of emancipatory career guidance (Hooley et al., 2021). Whilst I have attempted to identify some real-world examples of progressive and radical activities, I recognise that there are many more examples available. One of the aims of this workshop of course is to find these ideas and stimulate new designs for practice. So, it is hoped that by sharing my experience of developing and trialling this workshop, more good green practice will emerge.

Perhaps one of the key next steps for practitioners in the sector is to find useful spaces to share what they are already doing to address environmental issues through their work. Forums for sharing practice, resources and the challenges we experience are beginning to be established, in part as a result of the NICEC conference itself. As part of this effort I invite researchers and practitioners to contact me for a copy of resources used in this workshop and/or to support the formation of practice and resource sharing on this topic.

Workshop Outline

This workshop could be delivered in 2 ½ hours or over a morning or afternoon session, depending on how much time you may have available and the size of the group with which you are working. Below I provide an example of how to facilitate the workshop in 2 ½ hours – indicating where more time may be allocated if possible.

Time	Content/Activity	Resources
10-20 min	**Introduction** Aims for the Session Icebreaker For example in pairs talk about what the natural world means to you / sharing a positive experience of the natural world and getting to know each other	Slides
10 min	**Outline for the session** Introduction of the three stages (highlights only) Make the case for greening our practice	Slides
15-30 min	**Stage 1: Auditing our practice – part a** Start stage 1 by asking individuals to identify different types of practice that they typically use in their work. Provide some examples to support this.	Slides Padlet/Menti or similar or post it notes for capturing current practice
30-45 min	**Stage 1: Auditing our practice – part b** Introduce the Watts model and Packer's green lens version Ask participants to work in pairs or small groups to place their current practice into the matrix. Encourage group discussion about where different activities might sit and why. There are no perfect answers to this.	Slides Padlet or post it notes for capturing current practice Flipchart paper or prepared screen to move practice examples onto the matrix.
30-45 min	**Stage 2: Acknowledge challenges and barriers** Ask participants to consider (on their own initially) what challenges and barriers they have already identified as part of auditing their practice. In pairs and small groups participants to discuss these issues further. Collect the main issues for discussion as a group (via Padlet/Menti, voiced contributions, post it notes etc). Depending on the number, aim to discuss each one in turn validating the concerns. Ask for possible alternative views and solutions. End this part of the session with a reminder of the aims of greening our practice and some of key motivations behind this for career development (i.e. changes in labour market, strength of feeling about climate change amongst our learners and clients, importance of the issue to the world).	Slides Padlet or post it notes for capturing challenges and barriers

(Workshop outline continued)

Time	Content/Activity	Resources
30-60 min	**Stage 3: A stimulus for change** Introduce the Five signposts Provide examples for each of the signposts. Ask participants to look at one (or more) of their existing practice identified in Stage 1 and use the signposts to help them to adapt it. Share ideas, resources and explain their changes in partners and small groups. Using the post it notes (I used green ones) participants can note what they might do to change their practice (to 'green' it). Does this move their practice in more progressive or radical space on the matrix? If so they should physically move their post it note to the new position. If not, that is ok too but allow space to discuss this.	Slides
15-30 min	**What next?** What else may be needed to make your plans a possibility?	Slides Padlet
10 min	**Conclusion** Final thoughts Feedback Invitation to connect with others	Slides

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Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2024, Issue 53

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5310

Green career education and guidance through the perceptions and experiences of career practitioners in English secondary schools

Winner of the Bill Law Award for outstanding student research 2024

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To cite this article:

Nuttall, B. (2024). Green career education and guidance through the perceptions and experiences of career practitioners in English secondary schools. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *53*(1), 105-121. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5310

Abstract

The transition to a low carbon economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and nature restoration are expected to lead to a transformation of economic sectors. This will require a growth in green skills, a receptiveness to green roles and an understanding of the potential greening of all sectors. Plant suggests that green career education and guidance could provide the bridge between the emerging greener labour market and career development in schools. This article presents inductive qualitative research, using semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to explore the perceptions of career practitioners in English secondary schools revealing a broad spectrum of understanding and approach. A nascent green career education and guidance framework has emerged from a synthesis of existing literature and the research findings.

Key words: Green career education and guidance; green jobs; green skills; ecojustice; ideological perspectives; England

The OECD suggests that 25% of jobs will be affected positively or negatively by net-zero policies (2024). New and emerging green roles and traditional green sectors are likely to experience growth and transformation (Warhurst, 2024), as 'investment, regulation and technology shift towards net-zero' (ESCO Publications, 2022). This is particularly so in energy, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, nature restoration, transport, and in the decarbonisation of buildings (Green Alliance, 2024).

However, as economic sectors align with net-zero goals there will be labour market 'losers' as high emission industries restructure, downsize or exit the market (OECD, 2024), with job displacements disproportionately affecting specific regions. While net-zero transition is essential for a sustainable future, it represents significant social and economic challenges. Policies to support displaced workers through early career guidance intervention, upskilling and re-skilling are essential (OECD, 2024) to minimise impacts. Attracting new entrants and school leavers to green sectors will also be vital to address potential skills shortages (Green Alliance, 2024).

From as early as 1996, the seminal writings of Plant (1996; 2014; 2020) and Barham and Hall (1996) have discussed how career theory and practice may respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by the green transition. Plant calls for a 'paradigm shift' and a 'new utopian' approach for career theory and practice where green career education and guidance could be the bridge between the changing labour market and career development in schools (Plant, 2015; 2020; 2021; 2022). Existing literature provides a critical account of the academic views, theories and perspectives on green career education and guidance.

However, there is a lack of empirical research addressing how green career education and guidance is understood and approached in English secondary schools through the perceptions and experiences of career practitioners. Latest estimates indicate that 900,000 young people, between the ages of 16 and 24 are not in education, employment, or training (ONS, 2024). Providing accessible pathways for young people to gain green skills, which reduce the environmental impact of human activity, and employment in green roles/sectors could address skills shortages and help to tackle youth unemployment (Green Alliance, 2024; Linkedin Economic Graph, 2023). Indeed, to ignore the current school population is denying young people access to potential growth areas and leaving them unaware and unprepared for the transition towards net-zero and the impact this will have on the labour market and workplaces.

This qualitative and inductive study presents new research into what is happening in schools. It is designed to enable career practitioners to fully convey their thoughts on green career education and guidance. A synthesis of existing academic theories with the research findings on career practitioners' understanding and experiences has brought ideological, conceptual and practical ideas into one place. An unexpected outcome has been the emergence of a nascent green career education and guidance framework, which offers a variety of practicable career development approaches, for practitioners to consider.

Literature review

Towards an ecojustice approach to career education and guidance

Traditional career development theory has emerged out of a prevailing neoliberal ideological preoccupation with 'unrestrained economic growth', and 'unbridled exploitation of finite natural resources' (Irving, 2013, p.2). The emphasis is on individualism, the pursuit of economic goals and where social and environmental justice considerations are secondary to growth and economic development (Irving & Malik, 2019). Hooley and Sultana (2016) explore how a social justice perspective could provide an alternative to the neoliberal position. In the context of this article we might reframe this as an 'ecojustice' approach which acknowledges that vulnerable communities are more likely to be impacted by climate change, decline in biodiversity and experience environmental degradation. There is a need to mitigate against these unequal consequences, whether this is through technological solutions or through a change in our relationship with the natural world and changes to patterns of production and consumption.

Plant suggests that green career education and guidance could be the link between the emerging green labour market, ecojustice, and career development in schools (2021). Green career education connects sustainability and environmental education with career education, including an understanding of the impact of the transition to net-zero and a green economy on the labour market. Green career guidance can support a curiosity about green career opportunities and encourages young people to consider the environmental and community impacts of their career decisions.

Barnes refers to 'transformative' career education and guidance to 'prepare young people to contribute to the well-being of themselves, other people, places, and planet' (2020, p.272). This is a combination of technocratic (promoting work readiness and labour market realism), developmental (self-understanding, adaptability and resilience leading to personal growth and well-being) and emancipatory (not just about individual change but bringing about social change such as social mobility, social diversity, and community cohesion) rationalities. He suggests that a transformative approach may provide a useful structure for green career education and guidance.

On a similar note, Irving and Malik (2019) and Robertson (2020) suggest that careers can be either reactive, signposting green jobs and looking for a technological solution, or proactively part of the solution. In fact, by merely encouraging young people to look at green jobs is 'drawing a veil over deeper ecojustice issues' (Irving & Malik, 2019, p.258) and therefore not enough. For example, finding work in 'environmentally friendly manufacturing does not address the issues of over-consumption and short-termism of a throw away society…. at the expense of social equity and community well-being' (ibid, p.258).

Ideological perspectives on green career education and guidance.

Watts' quadrant framework (1996) relates career guidance practice to four ideological positions (conservative, liberal, progressive, and radical) which offers a useful structure to consider green career education and guidance. Watts suggests that different guidance approaches relate to the individual or society, and either support the current status quo or advocate for change. Hooley and Sultana (2016) use Watts' framework to challenge

career practitioners to decide whether their role is to primarily operate as a 'technocrat that skilfully helps others fit into the world as it is or whether they are prepared to work within a zone of professional discomfort and challenge injustices evident in contemporary labour markets and social relations more broadly' (p.5).

A 'conservative' position is concerned with work readiness and employability and helping individuals to adapt to the roles that society most needs them to be in, whereas a 'liberal' position respects the values and rights of the individual to make their own decisions regarding their careers and where guidance facilitates rather than influences (Watts,1996). This is aligned with a non-directive approach to career guidance. However, Irving (2013) raises the question of whether we should 'disrupt the illusion that all will be well if we simply enable young people to make career choices that may appear to be right for the moment' (p.7). A 'progressive' position challenges the 'conservative' and 'liberal' approaches and suggests that guidance needs to facilitate the individual to acquire the skills and attributes to achieve their potential within the existing status hierarchy of the opportunity structure (Watts,1996). However, critiques of this approach say that even though people may be moved around the 'systemic structure' it does not change the hierarchy itself and so does not address inherent structural inequalities or advocate for social justice (Watts,1996). Alternatively, a 'radical' approach to guidance seeks to promote social change and seeks to alter systemic and structural inequalities.

Dobson (2007) defines environmentalism 'light green' politics, as a managerial approach to environmental problems with a focus on cleaner technology and cleaner conspicuous consumption, and that technology can solve the problems without any 'fundamental change in present values or patterns of production and consumption' and is where a conservative and liberal perspective would be positioned (p.3). However, 'dark green' politics suggests an ecologist ideology and demands a radical change in 'our relationship with the natural world, and the creation of a new economic and social order which will allow human beings to live in harmony with the planet' (Porritt & Winner, 1998, p.9; as in Dobson, 2007, p.3). Dobson's ecologism is aligned to a progressive and radical perspective requiring significant changes to social, economic, and political order (2007). The question is whether green career education and guidance can be more than environmentalist, and if not, is an environmentalist approach sufficient given the existential climate and nature crisis?

Green career education and guidance in practice

A theme running though the literature is that green career education needs to start early and precede guidance as pre-school/primary school years are fundamental in determining beliefs, values, attitudes, and self-efficacy (Plant, 2021). This is where 'we can get individuals thinking about environmental issues' and that it is 'absurd to ask people to think about their careers and their futures without recognising that we face a major climate crisis' (Hooley, 2022).

Since the Paris Agreement in 2015 there have been a number of significant research projects on the contribution career education can make to the 'legally binding international treaty on climate change' (UNFCCC, 2015). The research of Di Fabio and Bucci (2016), Međugorac et al. (2020), and Santilli, et al. (2020) all present a compelling case for green career education to start early and to precede guidance. A particular theme emerging is the link between empathy, connectedness to nature and community and a receptiveness

to green roles, and that empathy can be fostered through a green career education programme (Di Fabio & Bucci, 2016).

Plant (2014) suggests that an awareness of the environmental impacts of career choices should be made explicit and opportunities are created for experiencing work that makes a positive contribution to the environment. In addition, labour market information (LMI) materials should include an environmental dimension and should be used alongside an 'inspirational list of green jobs and activities' (Plant, 2015, p.120).

Hooley et al. (2021) have developed 'Five signposts' to 'socially just career guidance' which encourages questions such as how changes in climate and environment will change the nature of work – growth, decline and transformation. Hooley (2022) stresses the need for an understanding of the unjust and unequal impact of climate change, with the most vulnerable, marginalised, and in particular girls and women being most impacted (British Council, [n.d.]).

Methodology

A case study research design was adopted with eight career practitioners as the case studies. This provided the necessary scope for detailed research when there was no comparator group, no claim to change overtime, no randomised controlled trial cases, and is not causal. A qualitative research methodology was used, with individual semi-structured interviews and a series of stimulus cards, to provoke reflection, discussion, and generate valuable insights.

Participants were selected purposively because they were all frontline practitioners involved in careers in English secondary schools. Recruitment was via LinkedIn and Facebook with eight practitioners volunteering to be part of the research They represented the state and private sectors and a range of roles including careers leaders, advisers, consultants and directors. Three participants worked in coastal counties where there is a growing potential for traditional green jobs, and where the impacts of climate change could be severe. The responses from these participants reflected a broader understanding of green career education and guidance. This data set is too small to make a claim that geographical location has affected responses and is not the intention of this research. However, this may be a consideration for future research.

This new research is exploratory and inductive and required working alongside the practitioners to learn from the complexity and richness of their perceptions and experiences. The findings, emerging from the repeated themes across the data set, represent the multiple perceived realities and understanding of participants, and an insight into what is happening in secondary schools. This has added a practical dimension to the existing literature and has contributed to the exemplification of the ideological/ecological positions of Watts (1996) and Dobson (2007). An unexpected outcome is the emergence of a new green career education and guidance framework.

The research received ethical approval from Nottingham Trent University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee in December 2022. Confidentiality and anonymity were respected during the process. Careful consideration was given to the interview schedule (phraseology of questions and prompts) as the researcher's own bias and values

may influence respondents. Balancing being part of the conversation but not being leading or influencing was at times challenging because of an inherent personal enthusiasm. Being reflexive of personal values when managing the data has been imperative.

A reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to manage the data, using the Braun and Clarke (2022) six phase approach, and Table 1 documents the iterative nature of the process.

Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four	Phase Five	Phase Six
Familiarisation phase. Eight interviews audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcription and audio -recording listened to several times to check for accuracy, and familiarisation with what has been said.	Generating initial codes. NVivo (CAQDAS) was used to code items and help to track/log the coding process. Coding was posteriori (no pre-existing data frame). Any item which was deemed as relevant to the research question was coded. The initial coding of the eight transcripts resulted in 215 codes and 1051 references. These were clustered around 6 parent codes. The average per file was 26 codes and 131 references. Codes were merged, sorted, recoded and uncoded. Codebooks generated by NVivo were used to track the evolution of codes.	Generating themes. Once all the items were coded, the emphasis moved to interpreting the aggregated meaning across the data set and how different codes could be clustered to form themes and sub-themes. Successive thematic maps helped to track this recursive process, showing the relationship between parent and child codes and the first stage in identifying themes.	Reviewing potential themes. The thematic analysis was not linear, and the reviewing phase led to deeper questioning of the standout repeated patterns across the data set.	Defining and naming themes. The final thematic map looked very different to the initial map, with 5 named themes and 24 sub-themes. These are organised into a thematic framework related to the research question (Table 2). Data items were identified to use as quotes when writing up the findings.	Producing the report. The order in which themes were reported was established so there was a logical sequence and would meaningfully build a cogent narrative of the findings and discussions.

Table 1. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) based upon Braun and Clarke (2022).

Findings and discussion

The findings were revealed through the post-interview RTA with five themes and 24 sub-themes (Table 2).

Themes	Sub-themes (merging and sorting codes)	Files	References
Greenwashing or a conduit for ecojustice?	This is an important part of a huge conversation	8	37
	There is confusion and risk of greenwashing.	6	23
	Lack of information coming into schools or reaching career practitioners.	6	12
Wrestling with green guidance and remaining ethical.	Wrestling with green guidance and remaining ethical.	8	15
	Adheres to the CDI code of ethics, non-directive	8	8
	Careers do not happen in a vacuum - how can the environmental context and the green economic revolution be ignored in guidance conversations?	8	16
	Signposting to traditional green jobs only if a student brings a green mindset to a guidance meeting.	6	24
	Tackling profound concepts in a 30-minute guidance conversation is unlikely.	8	10
	This is more than signposting to traditional green jobs.	2	4
	It is the responsibility of the practitioner to educate themselves and keep up to date.	1	1
	Guidance is more about the welfare of the young person and checking in with them.	2	2
Green career education needs to precede guidance.	Green career education needs to precede green career guidance	8	21
	Time and budget given to career education and guidance is 'woefully' inadequate.	8	95
	Sustainability education is happening to some degree but are there links to career education?	8	27
	Preconceptions and myths need challenging prior to guidance	8	24
	Can't see it, can't be it - lack of diversity is a real issue.	8	14
	The importance of responding to a ground swell of concern for the environment and climate voiced by young people.	4	12
Fostering a green ethos is everyone's responsibility.	This is everyone's responsibility and cannot be left to the drive and motivation of one person.	8	45
	Careers is a lonely position, there is a lack of status and influence in school – takes strong personal conviction.	6	12
	Reaching out to the wider community 'is the best thing we did'.	5	22
	External factors are seeping into the consciousness of career practitioners.	3	10
The importance of connecting with nature in and outside of the curriculum.	Fostering empathy and connectedness to nature needs to start early (pre-secondary).	7	20
	'So much to learn from each other and nature' - creativity in green career education is to be celebrated.	6	14
	Young people need explicit support and experiences to make the connections between nature and careers.	8	12

Table 2: Final 'thematic map' linking findings to five themes

Greenwashing or a conduit for ecojustice?

All participants agree with Hooley that career education and guidance should have a key role to play in helping people navigate the transformations in the labour market which will be the 'consequence of the transition to net zero' (2021). 'We are at the point now where we've got to have these huge conversations' and 'it is important, so they are prepared' (Carole). Sara looked at this from a broader perspective and felt the 'world of work depends on it'.

However, a recurring theme suggests there is a dearth of information coming into schools and lack of direction in how practitioners should be responding to the emerging green economy. The 'nebulous green language' is causing confusion, and the concern is that 'like other sectors there is a risk of greenwashing in careers because of this confusion and "green" becoming nothing more than the latest buzzword' (Linda).

Climate change is impacting on lives with the more vulnerable, particularly girls and women (Hooley, 2022) being most impacted. Hooley advocates for green career education and guidance to embrace the broader concepts of ecojustice. However, these connections between ecojustice and careers can struggle to gain traction according to Irving and Malik (2019) because of other pressing priorities and responsibilities in schools making this 'just one more thing' (Ann).

Wrestling with green guidance and remaining ethical.

Practitioners acknowledged that career development does not happen in a vacuum and the changing climate, environmental, digital, and economic contexts are real and happening. 'You would not ignore the change in digital and AI context so why would you ignore the changing climate and environmental context' (Fiona). All practitioners regarded their guidance practice as non-directive, respecting the rights of the young person to arrive at their own decisions, focusing on the individual and adhering to the CDI code of ethics. Therefore, most participants would only explore green pathways/roles if the young person took the lead, and they are most likely to signpost to traditional green sectors. 'I worry about impartiality. Shoehorning green careers into conversations does not sit well with my CDI ethics' (Sara), and there is a nervousness about imposing one's values on a guidance conversation. However, two participants talked about the distinctions between 'dark' and 'light' green jobs and 'ultimately all jobs will have a green dimension' (Linda). They believe green career guidance is 'far more than signposting green jobs' (Carole) and referred to the importance of 'linking career choices and planetary health'.

Hooley (2021) encourages practitioners to raise questions in guidance regarding the impacts of climate change on the labour market and raise awareness of the eco-injustice of the impacts of climate change. Asking moral and skills questions of LMI will help young people have a better understanding of the green credibility of the jobs and businesses they may apply for. This is similar to the critical realist approach to LMI suggested by Bimrose (2020) and Staunton (2022). Currently, there is no evidence of this level of conversation happening within guidance, not because practitioners do not think this is important, they just do not think this is practicable within a 30-minute guidance meeting. It was unanimously expressed that with the limited time, budget, and status given to career guidance, tackling such profound concepts in guidance is unlikely.

One participant believed it is the responsibility of the career practitioner to educate themselves about climate change, carbon literacy and transformations to the labour

market. Knowing how to interrogate LMI to find the sustainability credentials of businesses is a recommendation of Hooley (2021) and Plant (2021). However, participants all agreed this is difficult because of the lack of clarity and confusion around green terms and how information is presented or absent on websites.

Two participants voiced concerns that career sessions 'are more about the well-being of the young person' (Mary) and 'are more about safeguarding and checking in with students' (Ann). These participants could not see how a green dimension could be as important as these concerns. Nevertheless, the general consensus is that more information is needed on how to introduce a green dimension realistically and ethically to guidance interactions and 'there is a need for CPD to bring career practitioners up to speed' (Jane).

Green career education needs to precede guidance.

Sustainability/environmental education is happening in the majority of schools within subject areas, but the understanding of all practitioners is that connections are not being made with career opportunities and career development. Carole believes 'young people do understand climate and environmental issues, but they are not making the connections with their own career decisions, and this is where green career education comes in'. Careers education is delivered as part of a Personal, Health and Social Education (PSHE) course in all of the schools, and the amount of time dedicated to careers education is typically three to four hours per year for each year group. The unanimous perception is this is 'woefully inadequate' (Ann). The lack of dedicated career education time, the 'packed full' subject curricula, and the emphasis on other pressing priorities, makes a green career education unlikely to happen without significant organisational and systemic shifts in emphasis.

Practitioners feel that young people are more likely to develop a green mindset if preconceptions and misconceptions are challenged in a green career education programme that precedes the guidance interview. In fact, 'it would be dangerous to introduce a green dimension in guidance without a steady and embedded green career education programme' (Sara), and 'where else in the curriculum is there opportunity to join the dots between green jobs, green economy, environmental sustainability, and career development' (Carole). Participants agreed with Plant (2021) that stereotypes and myths form at an early age, and this is where valuable work can happen to foster green values and skills and challenge preconceptions.

A preconception amongst young people is that green jobs are only associated with traditional green sectors and the only progression is through STEM subjects. Practitioners are concerned about the lack of diversity in STEM subjects and the impact this may have on interest in green roles. Practitioners agreed it was important for minority groups to 'see someone like themselves in green work, otherwise we are short-changing groups of society' (Ann). However, Mary feels that 'it is hard to arrange visits and work experience never mind in 'green' sectors and roles with an eye on diversity of representation'. Participants found the Green Careers Week (GCW, 2024) interesting, and two participants used the resources to run sessions with KS3 students. One participant took the opportunity to host a dedicated Green Careers Fair so students 'could see the pathways to green careers' (Carole). Traditional green sectors, 'light' green roles, less obvious companies who demonstrate strong green credentials, and local FE colleges who run courses with a sustainability element were invited.

Practitioners also believe it is hard for young people to make the connection between their green interests/values and their careers. Many young people see green interests as more of

a hobby and 'something I do rather than something I can be', and evidently a preconception amongst students and parents is that 'green jobs do not pay well and are for activists' (Fiona).

The importance of listening to student voice is a repeated theme. Four participants believe there is a 'groundswell of concern' about climate change and environmental degradation and the career profession has a responsibility to respond to this. Santilli et al. (2020) are advocates for helping young people to become active participants in their own futures and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities and planet. Maggi, (2021) suggests that if young people feel they have no control over a 'gloomy' future they are more likely to disinvest in their education and future pathways.

Plant (2021) recommends changing the language used in career education and guidance to focus on the collective 'we' and 'us' to communicate a sense of purpose and a young person to feel part of the local and global community. Michel's (2017) Challenge Mindset offers a solution-focused approach to careers, beginning with the 'challenges' and what is important to the client. He believes this is more likely to help a young person face the challenges and embrace the opportunities that environmental and climate change may bring to their career choices.

Fostering a green ethos through green career education is everyone's responsibility

The strongest sentiment is that it is everyone's responsibility within the school to establish a green ethos and 'cannot be left to the drive and motivations of one person'. Participants were confident talking about green career education, are excited about the creative possibilities and believe this is where a green ethos can be fostered. One participant felt that the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy (DfE, 2022) was a good starting point. A green ethos in school can 'ripple out to families, who work in the community, go to different schools and colleges, have grandparents all of whom can be reached' (Carole).

Practitioners who talked about having an embedded green ethos within the school, worked in counties where there is a growing potential for traditional green jobs (wind, solar and nuclear), and/or they were coastal counties where the impacts of climate change are likely to be acutely affected. 'Coastal counties have great potential and therefore the labour market reflects this, and this is seeping into the consciousness of local career practitioners' (Fiona).

The findings showed that two participants are involved at senior leader and governor level and are instrumental in fostering a green ethos within the school, and four participants participate in local business and enterprise groups. They both felt that networking at the macro level was having an impact on the relationships between business, school, and councils, and was improving their understanding of the sustainability perspectives and green initiatives in their local area. 'Involving the local business community, having a proactive county and using the local press to celebrate the school's green initiatives has been invaluable. Reaching out to the wider community is the best thing we did' (Carole) and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of young people enquiring about pathways into green sectors and roles. Having a voice and influence at the meso and macro level is one of Hooley et al. (2021) 'Five Signposts' to socially just career guidance.

However, six participants felt that a significant inhibitor for developing a whole school green ethos is the lonely position of careers and the lack of status and influence within the school. They feel that prerequisites are for careers to have status in the school, backing of the headteacher and governors, time to provide CPD for staff, and a strong green personal conviction of the career practitioner.

The importance of connecting with nature in and outside the curriculum

There are a plethora of papers and theories relating to the significance of fostering empathy and a green mindset through connecting with nature, and the receptiveness of young people to green roles. This included the research of Di Fabio and Bucci (2016) who suggest that empathy can be learned through spending time in nature, and Santilli et al. (2020) who advocate for a sustainability education programme to raise awareness. Practitioners all believed that young people need explicit support and experiences to help make these connections.

The findings suggest that since COP27 (UN/COP, 2022) and the Green Careers Weeks, all schools have seen an increase in the number of nature-based activities in school, particularly in primary school. There were strong views that green awareness and connectedness to nature and community needs to start early because 'beliefs, values, and attitudes start early'. There was enthusiasm for the ecologism incorporated into primary school activities and the opportunities to use the school grounds for exploring and connecting with nature.

From the conversations, it is clear practitioners are searching for creative ways to bring a green dimension to their careers work and take every opportunity to link environmental and sustainability roles to career opportunities. Figure 1 provides some of the examples of the 'green' projects they have introduced.

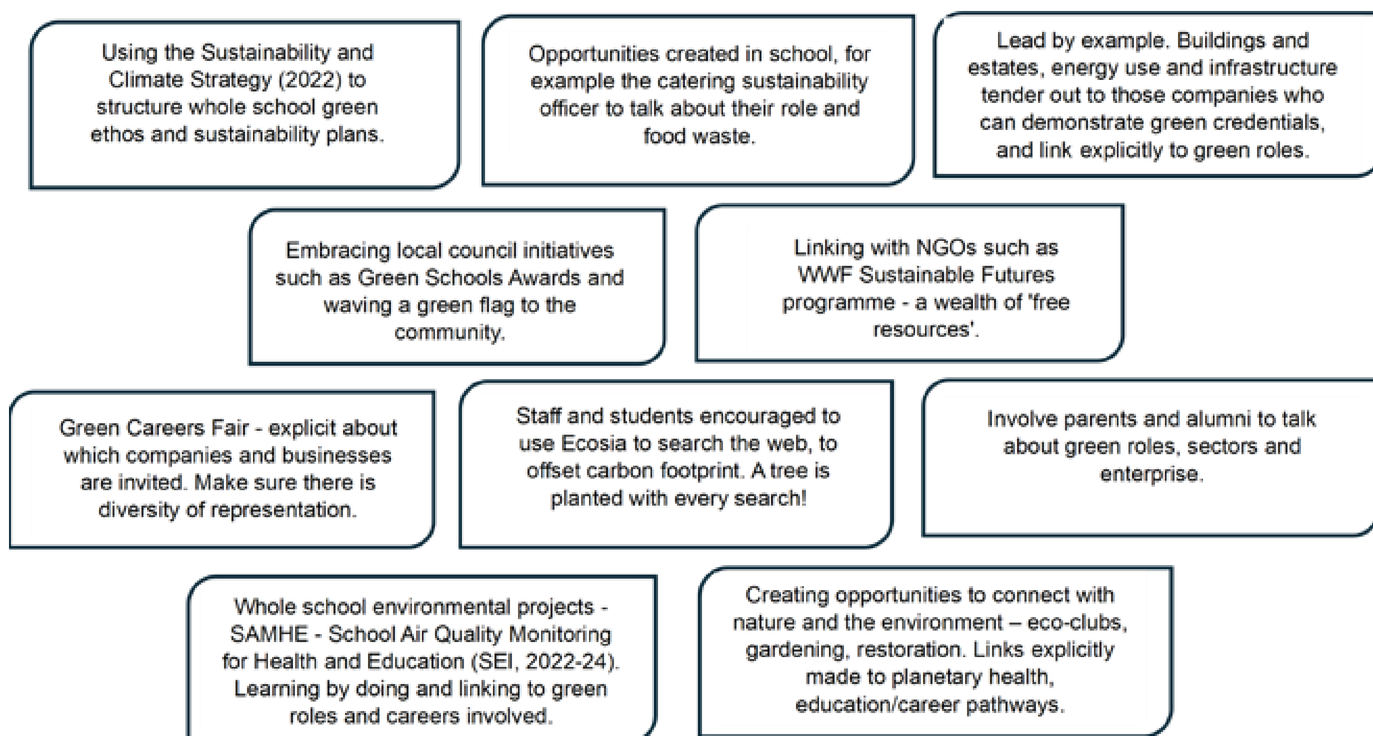
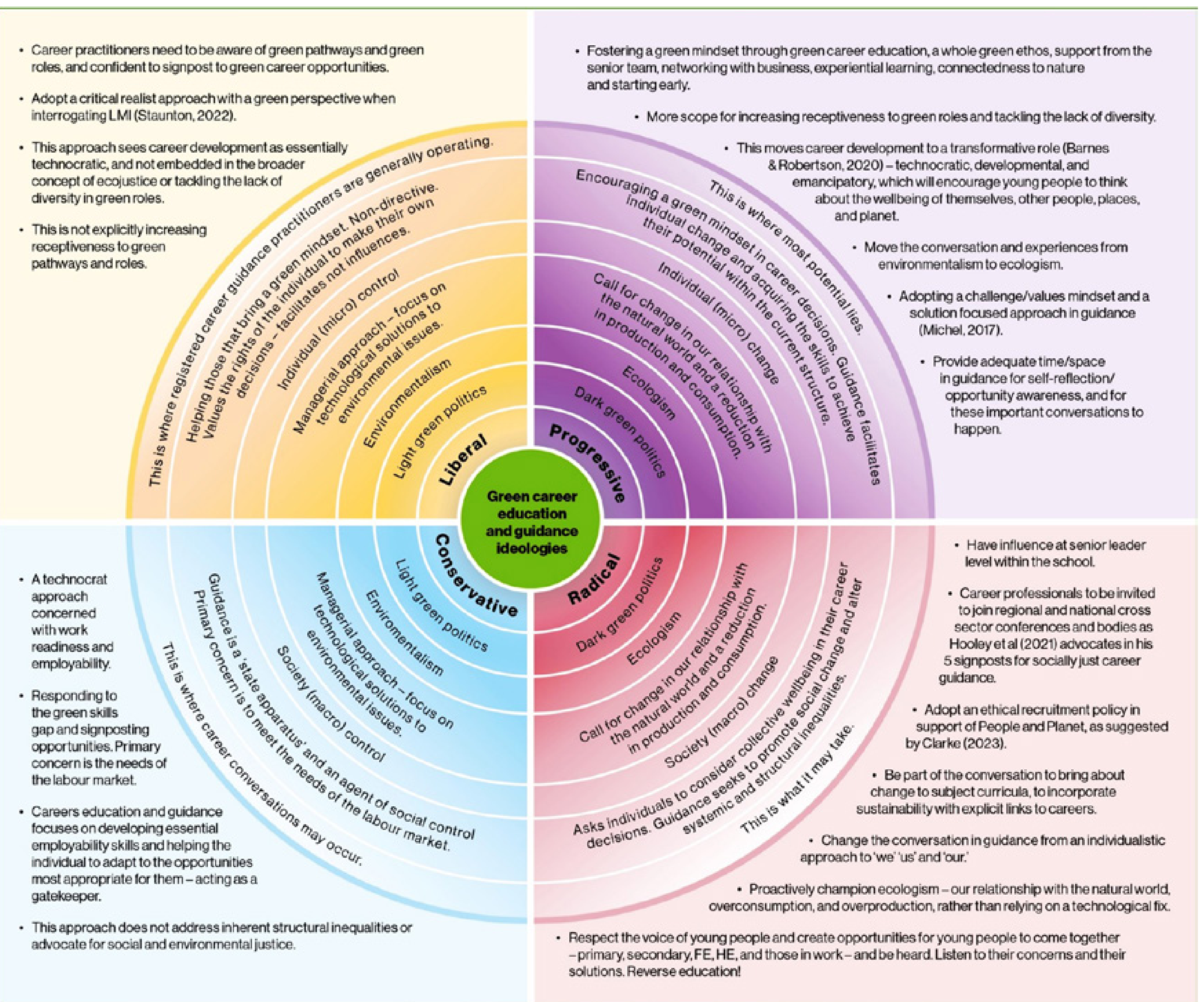


Figure 1. Examples of good practice from the experiences of the career practitioners.

However, because of time constraints and pressures on the secondary school curriculum these opportunities tend to be extra-curricular and voluntary and therefore only reaching a small number of young people. There does appear to be a relationship between the extent of nature-based and environmental activities in school, and the number of young people expressing an interest in green pathways and careers, but there is 'a need to remove some of the pressures schools are battling, to create space to foster a genuine 'green culture' (Paula).

Figure 2. A new green career education and guidance framework: a synthesis of existing literature and the research findings.



A synthesis of existing literature and research findings: the emergence of a nascent green career education and guidance framework

A new green career education and guidance framework has emerged from a synthesis of existing literature and the research findings. This visual representation (Figure 2) helps to clarify the complexities of Watts' ideologies (1996), Dobson's environmentalism/ecologism (2007) and the thoughts of Packer (2019). Academic theories and the perceptions and ideas of the participants (findings) are brought into one place, providing a comprehensive tool for practitioners.

The framework encourages practitioners to:

- reflect on their own ideological position and be reflexive of how their environmentalism/ecologism values could impact on guidance conversations and the content of the career education programme;
- use theories, approaches and practical tools to respond to different scenarios in guidance. For example, using a green critical realist approach to LMI with a student who expresses an interest in green roles, or using the Challenge Mindset cards to explore with students how their interests in climate and environmental issues may link to career opportunities; and
- bring a green dimension to a green career education programme drawing on different ideological positions.

However, further research is required to understand the value of the framework as a tool for practitioners and raises the possibilities for deductive research of the utility of the framework in practice.

Conclusion

Plant (2020) suggests that green career education and guidance could be a new paradigm for career development and could provide an alternative to the prevailing 'neo-liberal and individualistic' approach to guidance. This article provides the empirical evidence of the understanding and experiences of career practitioners. The findings reflect frustrations. Participants are aware of the need to acknowledge the climate crisis, the emerging green economy, and the impact on the labour market. However, the lack of time, status and budget in secondary schools for career education and guidance is inhibiting attempts to respond to this changing context.

Participants acknowledged the importance of linking sustainable/environmental education with career education and providing the opportunity for young people to make the connection between green opportunities and their own career decision making. Fostering a green ethos, a receptiveness to green roles and the importance of reflecting on the environmental impacts of career decisions were recurring themes. Participants believe a green approach could improve the employability of young people, help them to be more reflexive of their career decisions, and contribute to tackling the green skills gap.

The question of ethics in guidance was a major concern. Participants could not see a way of conducting green career guidance, in the way academics are suggesting, and remain ethical. All participants were cognisant that the transition to net-zero and the emergence of a greener economy will bring challenges and opportunities for current school leavers,

and they owe it to their clients to be 'educated' and informed of the impacts this may have on the labour market. Ignoring the changing context is not an option if the careers profession is to remain relevant and connected with the 'groundswell of concern' voiced by young people. However, practitioners are asking how a green dimension can be brought to guidance conversations with young people and remain ethical. The development of the framework presented in this article hopefully provides a way forwards through these dilemmas for future practitioners seeking to green their careers education and guidance programmes.

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News

Book reviews

10.20856/jnicec.5311

Title: Rethinking Retirement for Positive Ageing

Author: Dr. Denise Taylor

Publisher: Routledge 2023

224 pages

ISBN: 978-1-032-44847-3 (Paperback)

Price: £19.99

Reviewed by **Dr Michelle Stewart**, Independent Careers Consultant.

For many, our lives become immersed in work and family with little opportunity to plan our own future. Children move on. Work commitments change. Retirement is suddenly upon us or fast approaching. We may wonder 'What kind of life stretches ahead of us?' In this book the author, a career psychologist, award-winning career coach and published author, offers ways to help us to explore this unknown landscape; to understand who we are and what we want; to retain a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives. Based on her doctoral research, Denise addresses the personal challenges we can encounter as we enter this time of transition and renewal, inviting the reader to reflect on retirement as a process.

For those who are themselves facing retirement or working with clients towards the end of their working life, this book is a timely addition to our bookshelves. Cleary written and easily accessible, it reveals how a meaningful life is more than career success, or money in the bank (financial well-being). Essential to a belief that we matter, and our lives can make difference is a healthy relationship with ourselves and meaningful connections with others. Retirement can lead us to feel 'unmoored'. This practical guide to retirement helps us to find meaning in life and identify our purpose as we enter unchartered waters.

Title: Change your story

Author: Carolyn Parry, FRSA, FHEA, FCDI, RCDP, founder and lead coach of Career Alchemy, and former President of the Career Development Institute

Publisher: Wisdom Publishing, 2023

ISBN: 978-1-7395432-0-4 (Hardcover) / ISBN 978-1-7395432-1-1 (Paperback)

978-1-7395432-2-8 (eBook)

Price: Signed hardback giftset £25 / Signed paperback signed giftset £19 plus postage direct from https://www.careeralchemy.co.uk/store/c8/BOOKS.html

Prices via Amazon: Paperback £14.99; eBook £9.99, Hardback £19.99

Reviewed by **Dr Michelle Stewart**, NICEC Fellow.

Change your story by Carolyn Parry was inspired by her own experience of changing career direction, and is grounded in her considerable expertise and learning as a career coach working with early-stage and established professionals of all ages and backgrounds. The book is designed to inspire and enable the reader to take control of their life and create the working life they want. Its aim is encapsulated in the phrase a 'voyage of discovery towards a purpose driven life'.

The book is broken into four parts. Part one: 'Understanding your story' and Part two: 'Developing your story', are structured around the career stories of eight individuals, each illustrating an aspect of the learning journey. These stories help the reader to gain personal insight and to learn effectively. They are complemented by a series of career-related activities underpinned by theory and research. Part three: 'Achieving your story' offers strategies for success and well-being. Having established a sense of purpose that aligns with your core values, abilities and long term vision, this section addresses how that goal might be best achieved; that is, what to do next to move forward.

Part four is structured around the United Nations' seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. Carolyn defines each in turn, identifying key factors and related occupations. Beyond broadening the scope of possible job roles for the reader, this section lends itself to career practitioners supporting clients wanting to identify opportunities to develop their career and 'make a difference' in the world.

Accompanying the book is the author's 'INSPiRED' career and life planner. This enables the reader to chart their own career development, providing a strong sense of who they really are and the difference that is uniquely theirs to make – presenting career purpose and fulfilment. Independent research by iCeGS has demonstrated that the planner creates clarity of direction and confidence in 'getting there'.

On first reading I was a little overawed by the contributors' stories. All appeared to be high achievers, undaunted by the challenges life threw at them. All were determined, resilient and successful. Yet, certain aspects resonated with my own experiences; a sense of order and happenstance amidst life's uncertainty, offering an inner sense that I too could change my story. I was challenged by their curiosity, their spirit of adventure and openness to learning, even from failure; 'sometimes things have to fall apart to make way for new beginnings'. I was inspired by their willingness to take calculated risk. A theme running through the stories were 'light-bulb' moments, identifying work that left them feeling 'charged-up' or 'set-alight'. It was clear from the narratives that finding purpose – 'whether to help change the world or the world for one person' – came with a sense of being alive.

We all need to make sense of our working lives and vocational identity. The power of this book is that it provides a means of becoming conscious of the career we really want from life and to use our strengths to contribute to something in the world bigger than we are, while simultaneously treating ourselves with kindness rather than judgement. If you are interested in actively deciding on your own story and understanding the difference you are here to make – it's never too late to begin and this book is a great place to start.

News

Call for papers

Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

April 2025 Open Call Issue

Editor: Fiona Christie

This issue will have no specific theme. Articles are invited on any topic relating to career development. This may include:

- Career education, information, advice and guidance
- Labour market perspectives
- Policy, theory, and practice
- Professional issues
- Social justice
- Any setting for career development work

Planning an article

For enquiries about the suitability of proposed articles, please contact the editor, Fiona Christie: f.christie@mmu.ac.uk

Before writing, please read the author guidelines available here: www.nicec.org/pages/24-nicec-journal

How to submit an article

Go to the online journal home page www.nicecjournal.co.uk and select 'Make a submission'. Submit your manuscript there.

For consideration for the April issue, full draft manuscripts must be received by **6th December 2024**.

Forthcoming events | NICEC

News

NICEC offer a series of early evening seminars and longer network meetings during the year. Further details of the programme from March 2025 onwards will be announced in due course. Most of the events are online via Zoom.

Cost of Seminars and Network Meetings:

- Included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members.
- For non-members: £25 for seminars and £35 for network meetings
- For students: £4 for seminars and £7 for network meetings

Full details of NICEC events are available at https://www.nicec.org/pages/10-events

21 November 2024 5pm-6.30pm

The role of love in career decisions with Rosie Alexander.
Sigmund Freud said, 'Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness'

27 January 2025 5pm-6.30pm

Career coaching tools with Kate Mansfield and Gilly Freedman.

25 March 2025 5pm-6.30pm

Seminar - Topic to be confirmed

22 May 2025 2pm-5pm

Network meeting - Topic to be confirmed

1 July 2025 5pm-6.30pm

The Bill Law Awards

15 September 2025 5pm-6.30pm

Network meeting - Topic to be confirmed

20 November 2025 5pm-6.30pm

Seminar - Topic to be confirmed

Forthcoming events | CDI

Full details of CDI events are available at www.thecdi.net/training-and-events

CDI National Conference

26 & 27 November 2024, at The Studio, Birmingham

Over two days, this event provides learning and insight for practitioners, researchers, leaders and policymakers, offering unrivalled opportunities to enhance your own work and career. For leaders, strategic thinkers and policymakers, we will discuss global factors that impact the profession and our role in the education, skills and jobs ecosystems. For practitioners and researchers, it is a chance to hear examples of best practice, share insights and learn from the latest studies on supporting young people and adults.

Technical Education Programme: Update on T Levels

6 November 2024 Online Event

Join Kim Newman and representatives from the DfE for a T Level update. The Government has shown a strong commitment to the development and improvement of T Levels, as an important part of the post-16 qualifications landscape. As part of our series of webinars on technical education pathways, in this session you will hear very latest information on T Levels, the T Level Foundation year and progression pathways for young people.

Technical Education Programme: Update on HTQs

28 November 2024 Online Event

Join Kim Newman and representatives from the DfE for a Technical Education HTQ update. Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are Level 4/5 qualifications, such as Foundation Degrees, HNCs and HNDs. Recent research carried out by the CDI showed that many career advisers identified a bigger gap in their knowledge and understanding of HTQs compared to other technical education pathways. This webinar, part of a series on technical education pathways, provides an excellent opportunity to find out more about HTQs from the relevant team at the DfE and to update your knowledge on this range of qualifications.

Helping your clients with their mid-life career reinvention

21 November 2024 Online Event

Do you want to help your clients in their mid-life (45-60) to reinvent themselves when they are facing redundancy, feeling lost and unclear how to make themselves relevant again in the world of work? To regain their joie de vivre when feeling burnt out, dissatisfied and unfulfilled in their work? Then join us for this hands-on and interactive workshop, where we will learn how to help your clients in their mid-life to reinvent their careers.

Equity Diversity & Inclusion: EDI lunchtime sessions

8th November 2024 Online: Lack of awareness and sensitivity towards individuals with trauma in career development settings.

13th December 2024 Online: Ageism in hiring and career development; undervaluing older employees' experience.

17th December 2024 Online: Strategies for creating inclusive environments

CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

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

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

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

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

Below are a few of our major achievements:

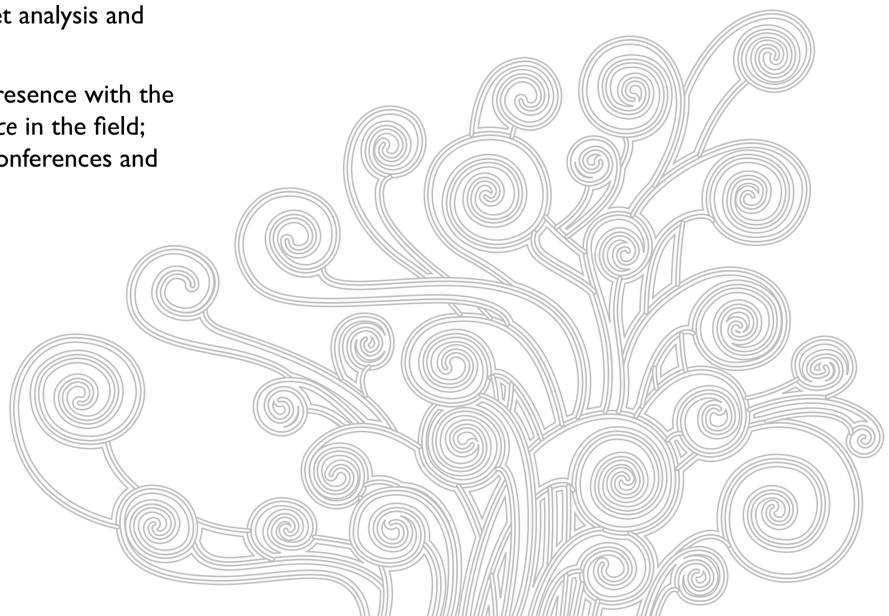
- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website **www.thecdi.net**; social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of CPD, skills training, webinars and conferences based on market analysis and members' training needs;
- A growing media and lobbying presence with the CDI recognised as the *expert voice* in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;
- The establishment of the UK Career Development Awards – ten sponsored awards including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Leader of the Year and Lifetime Achievement Award*;
- Clear focus on professional identity and increasing the professionalism of the sector through our influence, ownership and development of the QCD and QCG/D and the CDI Academy including the new *CDI Certificate in Careers Leadership*.

ASSURING QUALITY

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

We are delighted to be working in partnership with NICEC on the Journal and the NICEC/CDI research-focused events which take place twice a year across the UK.

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



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