Career Research & Development

The NICEC Journal

making practice
thoughtful and
theory practical

Aims and scope

Career Research and Development 'the NICEC Journal' is published for:

- Career practitioners working in schools, colleges, Connexions partnerships, higher education careers services, adult guidance agencies, companies, community organisations, etc.

- Trainers, lecturers, advisers and consultants working with career practitioners.

- Individuals working towards qualifications in career education, career guidance and career management.

- Government departments and business and community organisations with an interest in the work of career practitioners.

It sets out to:

- Promote evidence-based practice by making theory, policy and the results of research and development more accessible to career practitioners in their day-to-day work.

- Encourage discussion and debate of current issues in career research and development.

- Disseminate good practice.

- Support continuing professional development for career practitioners.

- Help practitioners to develop and manage career education and guidance provision in the organisations in which they work.

The Research Agenda

Ruth Hawthorn, Fellow and Acting Director for NICEC

In the spring of 2005, NICEC analysed and wrote up a consultation exercise carried out by the National Guidance Research Forum's (NGRF) Strategic Group (Hawthorn et al., 2005). The NGRF had cast its net widely, through an electronic questionnaire to practitioners, managers, policy-makers and researchers, and through a series of workshops around the country that included the launch of the NGRF's website in September 2004, a gathering of tutors of the Qualification in Careers Guidance, an IAG partnership meeting and a number of other events for stakeholders at which these two questions were debated:

- How can we improve guidance research in the UK? (This included asking about research gaps, improving research capacity and quality, and how to involve guidance providers in research.)

- How can we use research to improve practice? (This included helping practitioners, managers and policy-makers access and make use of research findings, bring research into training and CPD, and inform the work of providers who do not have a specialist professional training.)

The consultation could not tell us what the actual research gaps were, of course, but they did tell us what people across all sectors of guidance saw as areas they would like to know more about, genuinely setting the agenda for the future not only of primary research but for more (and more accessible) reviews of existing research, and for better ways of disseminating findings to potential users. It also showed that there was a real interest, from these admittedly self-selected groups, to be more involved in research themselves. There were some practitioners and managers who felt able to keep up with the literature and share it with colleagues, and some who were involved in research themselves; but there were also many who admitted that regretfully they were just not able to do this any more, following the increased pressure on them to meet statutory requirements. Further evidence of the erosion of the professional development that could be so helpful to clients, that ironically follows from inappropriate service targets, and of the difficult climate in which all partners are trying to generate a research culture in guidance.

The many topics mentioned by respondents to the NGRF consultation included a wish to know more about the guidance needs of specific target groups. The current issue of this Journal includes reports by Vivienne Barker and colleagues on the guidance needs of people with mental health problems, by Barrie Irving on the career education needs of Muslim girls, and by Sonali Shah on the career choices of young people with disabilities, all groups in which NGRF respondents expressed a particular interest. Respondents also wanted to know more about the guidance needs of graduate students, and in this issue we are able to publish an update on the research by Helen Bowman and Helen Colley on the guidance needs of MA students; they focus on that particular group, but their findings raise questions about the needs of all studying at postgraduate level.

The first article by Helen Colley in this Journal explores more directly the issues raised by the NGRF report, namely the relationship between research, policy and practice that is central to NICEC's own ongoing mission. This important piece has close links with the paper by Michael White that was delivered in October 2004 as the first John Killeen Lecture, funded by Ufi learndirect. The late John Killeen, Fellow of NICEC, was a keen believer in the importance of methodologically robust research in the evaluation both of policy measures and of guidance practice: the last issue of the Journal was devoted to articles commemorating John and his work. Michael's article in the current issue, together with Helen's, point forward to the next initiative to promote a stronger evidence base for guidance, namely the third Cutting Edge research conference to be held in 2006. Since the second conference in 2003 there have been considerable developments in building research-policy-practice links, such as the creation of the NGRF website, the National Library Resource for Guidance at Derby, and the NGRF Strategic Group itself. The 2006 event, to be planned by NICEC in collaboration with the Strategic Group and the Federation of Professional Associations for Guidance, FEDPAG, will be able review these developments and offer a showcase for the research of all kinds that has followed from them.

Reference

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Research, Policy and Practice in Guidance: What Should the Relationship Be?

Helen Colley, NICEC Fellow and Research Fellow at the Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University

Introduction

The NICEC Network met in October 2003 to discuss important issues arising from the second 'Cutting Edge' Conference earlier that year, and from the Guidance Council's consultation on the new National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) being funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). We set ourselves two questions for consideration:

- what would a research agenda look like that was better linked to policy and practice?
- what can the research community do towards strengthening its links with policy and practice?

I and Sylvia Thomson (President of the NACGT and a NICEC Associate) were asked to lead off the discussion with short stimulus papers from researcher and practitioner perspectives, and this article is based on my presentation. From my point of view – as a researcher deeply involved in participant research with practitioners – the above questions cannot be answered without addressing a third, more fundamental issue: what should the relationship between research, policy and practice be, and what shape should it take? I review here the challenges as I see them. Throughout, I use the term 'career guidance' as shorthand for a range of practices relating also to careers education, career development, career management and other forms of 'career work'. I conclude by linking the ideas from that discussion to some strategic considerations for the future.

A researcher's perspective

The social science research community is still a diverse one, and no individual could credibly claim to present 'the' researchers' perspective. Debates about methodological approaches, the place of values in research, and ideologies, continue to rage in educational research, as can be seen from a glance through the pages of the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) newsletter, *Research Intelligence*. I write from a particular standpoint, one which is increasingly marginalised – but by no means unique – within that community.

It is marginal because my central interest is in career guidance, and that is a very small sub-field within educational and social science research, with apparently few champions within the current government or the research councils. It is also marginal because my perspective is a critical one, interested in problems of social inequality and purposes of social justice, particularly in relation to class and gender. I believe strongly that the academy should contain 'gadflies', to borrow Socrates' metaphor, to sting the conscience of any democratic society, and the task I undertake here is a deliberately catalytic and provocative one.

In thinking about how better to link research to policy and practice, we need to consider three re-framings of that question, which underpin the challenge in crucial ways:

1. what should the relationship between research, policy and practice be?

2. how can we preserve the independence and academic freedom of research, and why does that matter?
3. how can we preserve and value diversity in research – and why does that matter too?

What shape should the research-policy-practice relationship take?

How do we conceive of the relationship between research, policy and practice? To put it another way, how can knowledge and power speak to each other? (By knowledge, I refer here both to the theoretical and empirical knowledge generated by researchers and practitioner-researchers, but also to the practical knowledge, both explicit and tacit, of practitioners who may not be actively engaged in research themselves, and of service users.)

There are, I believe, two different and fundamentally incompatible ways of visualising that relationship. I use the term 'feedback loop' model as the one which seems to dominate all too often at present. It looks rather like this:

Policy ⟶ Practice ⟶ ⟶
Research
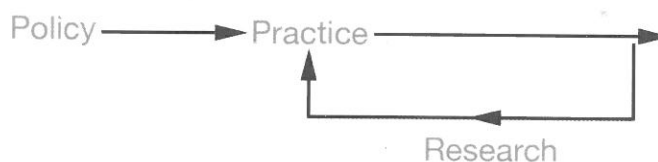
This is, as all illustrations are, an over-simplification, and a somewhat cynical one, though it depicts aspects of the relationship that many may recognise as true in their experience. Policy makers seize upon what look like

good ideas or popular innovations, and launch initiatives. Often this is done in a rush of fervour, without sound evidence, or without sufficient time to pilot innovations – a phenomenon that has been described as 'policy hysteria' (Stronach and Morris, 1994). Despite the frequent dismissal of theory as irrelevant to practice by policy-makers, every such initiative is inevitably based upon a tacit theory of some kind. They typically assume, for example, that if intervention x is carried out, then outcome y will ensue (Pawson, 2002). Practitioners are then expected to 'deliver' these initiatives rapidly, in ways that are increasingly prescribed from the bureaucratic centre. Research is used to evaluate practice, tell policy-makers 'what works', and ensure that practitioners continuously improve what they do. Stronach and Morris highlight the conformative aspect of such evaluation, pointing out the pressures to show not so much 'what works' as to demonstrate 'that it works'. There is also the possibility that findings which indicate flaws in policy will be generally ignored. Of course we need evaluation research, and of course practitioners need feedback, especially on new initiatives. But this model rarely allows feedback to extend all the way back to the start of the loop.

A recent report by the OECD (2002) on educational research in England suggests a more sophisticated model would have less emphasis simply on planning and implementation:
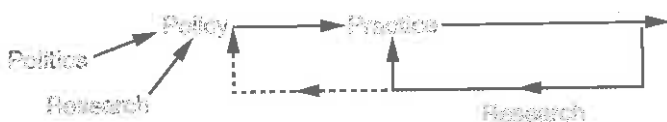
When policy does draw on research before initiating change, this is often in response to a lead taken by practitioners, who have already seized upon theoretical developments in their field and used them to transform models of practice. We can look back at the history of career guidance and see, for example, how the ideas of Donald Super or Carl Rogers – thinking 'outside the box' – influenced the practice of career guidance, and how these new ideas and practices in turn influenced policy. The loop would look very different if it mapped these developments.

Even if the feedback loop were to extend back to evaluate policy itself more often (as in the dotted line above), we are still confronted with a fairly linear cycle which presents an impoverished notion of informing and sharing knowledge. If such a model is seen as the sole or predominant relationship between research, policy and practice, this creates a number of dangers:

- practice becomes distorted, because it becomes focused only on what can be easily measured, and only in terms of the outcomes desired by policy-makers

- practitioners can become de-skilled and de-professionalised as practice becomes prescribed in simplistic and reductionist ways
- the knowledge-power axis becomes the preserve of researchers and policy-makers, and the deep but often tacit knowledge of practitioners, earned through their lived experiences, becomes silenced by dismissal as 'vested interest' or 'refusal to modernise' – as does the knowledge of service-users (Hodkinson and Smith, 2004)
- the relationship between research and practice can become tense and corrupted – audit and evaluation can become games that people learn to play and subvert (Strathern, 1997)
- research is too often done 'on' rather than 'in' practice, treating practitioners as the objects of research rather than as collaborators in it (Bloomer and James, 2003)
- research can become limited to the reactive rather than the proactive, questions which are uncomfortable for policy-makers cannot be asked, thinking cannot be done 'outside the box'
- 'what works?' becomes the worst of all possible research questions when it becomes the only research question that is legitimated
- policy-makers can easily switch tack when individuals move on, newcomers want to make their own mark, or economic pressures assert themselves, leaving both research and practice at once stranded and chasing the coat-tails of a new agenda
- there is accordingly very little support for longitudinal rather than short-term studies
- when knowledge tries to speak to power, it is often impossible to make itself heard above the noise of politics (Pawson, 2003)

A prime example of proactive research related to guidance for lifelong learning, that has provided important evidence but been ignored by policy-makers, is the work of Phil Hodkinson and the late Martin Bloomer (eg. Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999). Building on Hodkinson's theory of careership, they carried out a study for the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA – now replaced by the Learning and Skills Development Agency) on retention and drop-out in FE. Their evidence revealed the complexity of students' learning careers and their decisions to drop out, and the wide range of both positive and negative factors involved. Despite this evidence, the funding régime of FE has become entirely based on absolute but abstract measures of auditing attendance and retention which are nothing short of senseless. Just a week before the NICEC Network meeting at which we were discussing these issues, Park Lane College in Leeds – arguably one of the very best FE colleges in this country in its quality of provision and success in widening participation – had been forced to announce 90 staff redundancies in the face of a £4 million claw-back from the Learning and Skills Council, thanks to this auditing system, with enormous negative

implications for teaching, for learning, and for students' future careers. One of the hardest hit areas of the college may be the career guidance unit, even though the last two years have seen them swamped with unprecedented student demand from young people who received little or no guidance at school, because they were not in the priority group for *Connexions*.

There is an alternative model for the relationship between research policy and practice, which may help to avoid these dangers. It is one based on 'responsible research' as 'an engaged social science', and is founded on mutually informing dialogues (Edwards, 2002a, b). Reciprocity in listening to and communicating with others offers a very different shape for this relationship:
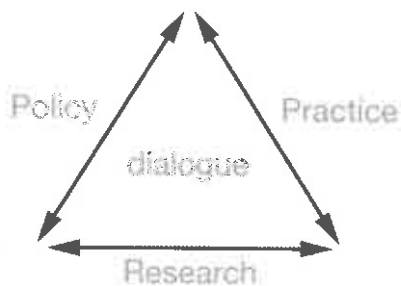
Once again, I would emphasise that 'practice' refers both to practitioners and to users of guidance. This allows us to pose a whole set of other research questions 'outside the box', above and beyond simply 'what works?'. We can also ask:

- what *happens*?
- how do initiatives work *differently* in different contexts?
- what are the *unintended* as well as intended consequences?

More critically, we can ask a very important set of questions that is all too often ignored:

- what does 'it works' mean?
- what are the *hidden* consequences?
- what interests, purposes and values underpin the judgement that 'it works'?

Many of these questions are addressed (albeit often by stealth) by researchers conducting evaluation studies, but our space to do so is becoming more limited by current policy approaches, and 'warning shots' are sometimes fired across our bows, particularly in respect of the final question in this list. David Blunkett, when Secretary of State for Education and Employment, paradoxically claimed that the government is open-minded and welcoming towards research, but warned the Economic and Social Research Council that researchers had to become more 'street-wise' – that is to say, keep their findings in line with common sense – if they were to retain any credibility (Blunkett, 2000).

This, however, raises the question of what is meant by 'common sense', which is not necessarily the same thing as 'current government policy'. One person's common sense may appear ludicrous to another – many practitioners from different professional backgrounds are no doubt experiencing this within *Connexions* at the moment. Moreover, critical researchers would argue that some significant amount of research at least must go beyond the superficial appearances of social realities to *disrupt* common-sense understandings and taken-for-granted assumptions. Without this, as the French sociologist Bourdieu (1992) notes, thinking may no longer be our instrument for expanding knowledge. Instead, we are condemned to become the instruments of the problem we claim to be thinking about. This caution leads directly to my second question about academic freedom.

The need for academic freedom

What a dialogue-based model both allows and challenges us to pursue is the need (alongside other kinds of study) for 'blue skies' research: proactive research – sometimes more purely theoretical – that is genuinely and fruitfully independent. 'Theoretical' does not, in my opinion, mean 'irrelevant' to policy-makers and practitioners, though it may be troubling or even troublesome. There is sometimes nothing so useful as a good idea. Better understandings rather than guidelines for good practice can be effective bases for reflective practitioners to enhance what they do.

All too often, however, those in or close to government have defined 'blue skies' research simply as thinking the unthinkable in terms of the modernisation/privatisation/rationing of public services such as career guidance, education and healthcare. Theoretical research in particular has been ridiculed, and researchers have been posed with a stark choice between 'influence or irrelevance' (see again Blunkett, 2000). Critical researchers are dismissed as mere 'ideologues'. The link between policy and (legitimate) research is becoming drawn ever tighter. Some of the country's leading social scientists – people like Martyn Hammersley and Ray Pawson – are arguing that we are in danger of losing the capacity for genuine 'blue skies' research, including the capacity to be constructively critical of policy and practice when necessary.

This capacity requires academic freedom, and academic freedom has to be funded, or it faces a modern-day draught of hemlock. It is worth the use of public funds – and the risk that a small amount of research may possibly be 'zany' or 'irrelevant' – because it is a cornerstone of a democratic society that can make its rulers, as well as its researchers and practitioners, accountable to its citizens. We need gadflies as much as Socrates' Athenian democracy did, but there are considerable fears in the broader educational research community that the gadflies are being swatted by the increasing difficulty in gaining

funding to do such research. 'Policy influence' and 'practical relevance' are highly subjective and value-laden concepts in themselves, and other agendas are likely to get erased (Hodkinson, 2004).

A prime example is the government's social exclusion agenda. Many researchers in education and the social sciences have argued that this has obscured the agenda on social *inequality* (eg. Byrne, 1999, Levitas, 1996, Silver, 1994). It is ironical that we have to go back to the early 1990s and the previous Conservative administration to find DfEE-commissioned research on career guidance and institutional racism (as we now term it post-Macpherson) (see Wrench and Qureshi, 1996, Wrench and Hassan, 1996). The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) had to commission a report (Rolfe, 1999) on the widespread failure of careers services to address gender inequality in the late 1990s in the absence of government interest in this topic. This pointed to the 'refocusing' agenda and the Connexions policy as having considerably worsened that situation. The work of leading experts on class and other inequalities have been completely ignored, such as Stephen Ball, Diane Reay and others' critique of policies to widen participation in higher education (eg. Ball *et al.*, 2002), and of the assumptions about transition to HE which underpin those policies. Much (though not all) of this kind of research draws on qualitative data to present in-depth evidence of the complexity of social interventions and the social lives into which they reach. This leads us to my third question, about diversity in research.

Preserving and valuing diversity in research

The idea of the NGRF has followed on from the establishment of the National Educational Research Forum (NERF). However, the objectives and approach of the NERF have been hotly contested in the educational research community, with fears that narrow interpretations of 'setting priorities relevant to policy and practice' might potentially counteract the declared purpose of also stimulating debate and thinking. All too often, the need for 'robust research' is used as shorthand for standardising the criteria for judging the quality of research, and consequently for restricting research funding only to certain methodological approaches. BERA as an organisation has fiercely opposed the imposition (official or de facto) of such criteria, arguing that consensus can never be achieved, and that over-arching criteria can only be established to identify aspects of flawed research. Beyond this, each paradigm must be judged according to its own internal criteria.

The NERF, as well as the newly founded 'EPPI-Centre', are seen by some as promoting an implicit hierarchy of methods around the mantra of 'evidence-based practice'. That hierarchy places randomised controlled trials (RCT) and other experimental models, including the medical models of Cochrane/Campbell-style systematic review, at the pinnacle. Qualitative research and interpretative methods, which are much closer to practice, and often use participative or action research methods to involve practitioners and service users, come somewhere near the bottom of this 'pyramid'. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain funding for any research which does not incorporate a significant element of quantitative methods, and I have recently heard qualitative evidence dismissed as offering 'no evidence, only anecdote', and as 'ethnodrama'.

Of all communities in the social sciences, the guidance community should beware of this trend. There is a strong argument that medical models are inappropriate for understanding the complexity of social interventions like career guidance. Our traditions of research have always relied on the use of different methods to answer different questions. We need large-scale quantitative surveys, including longitudinal data, to answer certain questions. These include critical questions addressed by researchers like Ken Roberts and David Byrne, such as: what are the underlying patterns of career trajectories, what is the opportunity structure, and what is the impact of social structures on career? Qualitative data can never tell us these things.

We also, however, need the sort of small-scale but in-depth interpretative and narrative work that has been championed by researchers like Audrey Collin, Phil Hodkinson, Bill Law, and Richard Young. These tell us answers to different questions. They tell us the 'how' and the 'why', rather than just the 'what'. They allow us to see the significance of individual experiences which become invisible in the averaging-out of large-scale data to show trends, but they also allow us to generalise in non-statistical ways, for even small volumes of qualitative data still allow for the possibility of offering well-constructed explanations of experiences that resonate broadly and can be applied to other situations. They are just as vital as statistical surveys in the world of guidance, where our interpersonal work with clients, including their perceptions of themselves and their worlds, and our ability to enter that frame of reference, all form a crucial part of our practical and ethical tradition.

This is an important point, for a defensive reaction to the imposition of methodological hierarchy might be to compromise: to say, 'fine, let's go for larger qualitative samples' (though this approach is usually seen as 'too expensive' to be funded anyway), or 'let's use mixed methods'. But if we need different methods to answer different questions, enlarging samples and mixing methods doesn't help; it may only hinder clarity. The inquiry should drive the methods, rather than methods driving inquiry. The fundamental assumption of those who privilege RCT and systematic review is that *the data can speak for themselves*. But however rigorously the facts have been obtained, this is never true, and least of all in the social sciences. All inquiries apply subjective judgements and interpretation to their data;

only some do so more transparently than others. The nub of good research lies in its interpretation of the data and *the explanations it offers*. What research tells us about knowledge is that knowledge itself is only ever provisional. The crucial leaps in knowledge that humanity has achieved – including in the physical sciences, like quantum mechanics for example – have predominantly been leaps of the *imagination*, of theory, rather than the discovery of a whole new body of data.

All of this is itself of nought but academic interest of course, unless guidance is treated by those who do fund more independent research (like the research councils) as a priority. I conclude by returning to the subject of our discussion at the NICEC Network.

How can research be better linked to policy and to practice?

There is a danger that the current mantra of 'evidence-based practice' is obscuring some other important approaches that we need alongside it (Hodkinson and Smith, 2004). In particular, it has led a 'discourse of derision' in relation to critical research addressing social inequalities (Edwards, 2002a). Yet, following Watts (1996), we might argue that such critical research is an essential element of a healthy research culture in the field of guidance. Guidance operates at the interface between personal lives and socio-economic structure, and is therefore a deeply political process, serving either to reinforce or reduce social inequalities.

Rather than just evidence-based practice, how about some practice-based evidence, drawing on the knowledge and experience of practitioners and service users themselves, and conducting research 'in' not 'on' guidance? What about theory-based policy? It might help to acknowledge more openly that we do in fact have theory-based policies, and that policy-maker's theories need critiquing against other theories that might possibly be more appropriate bases for policy and practice. Hodkinson and Smith (2004) offer a powerful theoretical analysis, suggesting that the most constructive relationship between research, policy and practice is one that acknowledges the process as one of judgement-making through co-learning. They understand such learning as a social, situated, emotive and embodied practice (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991, Beckett and Hager, 2002). Such approaches open up different ways of answering the questions we set ourselves at the NICEC Network meeting, and I offer some contentions in response to those questions here.

A research agenda that was better linked to policy and practice might:

- be located in a three-way relationship of dialogue rather than a one-way conformative relationship
- evaluate policy as well as practice
- defend and resource academic freedom to do 'blue skies' and critical research

- resist methodological hierarchies, and use different methods to answer different questions
- ask more complex questions than simply 'what works?'
- value practice-based knowledge
- do research in, not on, guidance
- be adequately funded, via both commissioning and independent sources such as research councils

Research would be better linked to policy if it were:

- More *loosely* linked with policy agenda-setting
- More *strongly* linked via reciprocal dialogue

Research would be better linked to practice if:

- it were more *strongly* linked, by conducting research in, not on, practice
- it were more *strongly* linked, by recognising professional and personal knowledge/experience
- it were more *strongly* linked, by policy-makers resourcing models of practice that encouraged practitioners to engage with research at various levels

Taking the dialogue forwards

What role should NICEC play in taking forward the relationship of dialogue between policy, practice and research? Brown and Ecclestone (2002) draw on the ideas of Lakatos to describe the features of a 'progressive' research programme, and the same ideas might be relevant to developing the strategic role of a network such as NICEC. They argue that a healthy programme (or network) should:

- bring together disparate individuals in diverse places working around a particular theme
- unite them in agreement about key questions, principles and values
- identify 'hard core' principles to defend against all-comers
- also identify 'expendable' issues on which a more pragmatic and contingent stance can be taken or negotiated
- willingly seek out and engage constructively with dissent, rivalry and even hostility, in order to avoid either compliance with or marginalisation from particular sectors (eg. policy-makers, practitioners and managers of careers education and guidance), and in order to prevent internal complacency and solipsism.

Without such agreement, contest and engagement, they suggest the tendency will be for the programme/network to wither. The publication of the OECD/EC/World Bank reviews of international guidance policies, along with the strong challenges faced by guidance in the UK at present, seem to offer a significant cusp of opportunity to promote a healthy network along these lines. To do so, however, we need to continue to place ourselves at the cutting edge

of policy, practice and research. In developing a long-term strategy for NICEC, we might usefully consider how we could progress these ideals through specific initiatives in all aspects of our work. In respect of its research dimension, these might include among other activities:

- developing our programme of seminars and network meetings, including by inviting those who dissent from or are hostile to our 'hard core' (one current example is Hayes', Ecclestone's and Furedi's warnings that guidance may become part of the process of 'therapising' education);
- discussions that identify gaps in knowledge or problems for practice that policy-makers may not prioritise, but which relate to our 'hard core' principles and values;
- proposals to obtain funding for research in these areas;
- 'think-tank' meetings and publications;
- seminar series, leading towards the publication of an edited collection of articles.

My intention in this paper has not been to privilege one form of research over another, but to assert the importance of diversity, and to suggest the danger of gaps developing in guidance research. I do not argue for qualitative research rather than quantitative methods, nor for 'blue skies' research as opposed to policy-initiated research, nor for theoretical research as 'better' than empirical research, nor for academic research versus practitioner research. We need to pursue – and respect – *all* these types of research. Adopting Lakatos' principles along with the goals of co-learning and judgement-making (Hodkinson and Smith, 2004) might offer us a useful starting point for deciding what research is most important and 'best' to pursue at any particular time.

Acknowledgement

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Inclusion in Work and Learning: Providing Information, Advice and Guidance to Adults in Acute Psychiatric Units

Vivienne Barker, Paul Markby, Deborah Knowles and Ruth Winbourne

Focusing on the inclusion of people with mental health disabilities

The Government's social inclusion agenda has a number of strands focused on mental health. These include the introduction of the National Service Framework for Mental Health (NSF) (DoH, 1999) which sets out the way modern mental health services will be delivered. It recognises that mental health services users, particularly those with complex and long-term needs, may require help with other aspects of their lives provided through a system of effective care co-ordination. The emphasis is on service-user involvement and the rights of people with mental health disabilities. The NSF specifically requires mental health services to combat discrimination and to promote social inclusion. Mental health services are being encouraged to move towards acting as catalysts for inter-agency and partnership working in order to promote inclusion and enable access for people with mental health disabilities to 'meaningful activities', including education and employment (DoH, 2002a, 2002b).

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2001), in a report commissioned by the National Service Framework Workforce Action Team, identified that mental health practitioners working with people with severe mental illness are facing a period of rapid change in provision. The Centre identifies a move away from focusing on hospitalisation towards the delivery of integrated community-based services involving multiple agencies - social services, housing, primary care, and the voluntary sector. The approach centres on user need and evidence-based interventions. Further, this report identifies the capabilities needed to implement the National Service Framework by mental health practitioners providing direct care services to adults. These include:

'A commitment to support and facilitate service users' opportunities to obtain meaningful and independent work where they can develop skills, receive an income and contribute to the community'

and also

'The ability to maximize user strengths and interests and increase their participation in meaningful community activities' (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2001, p21).

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) investigation into mental health and social exclusion is a second strand of the social inclusion agenda focusing on mental health. The SEU consultation document 'Mental Health & Social Exclusion' (2003) seeks to address the following questions:

1. What more can be done to enable more adults with mental health problems to enter and crucially, to retain work?
2. What more can be done to ensure that adults with mental health problems have the same opportunities for social participation and access to services as the general population?

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE, 2003) response suggests that recognition should be given to the key role that adult learning has in enabling people with mental health issues to engage in employment and social participation and that:

'...sensitive and empathic guidance is needed as a first step into learning for many adults, particularly those with mental health needs. Guidance allows for individual needs, preferences and ambitions to be identified and for individual learning plans to be devised. Time invested in this process enables adults to successfully access appropriate learning' (NIACE, 2003).

The provision of an information, advice and guidance service that is able to offer guidance and support in relation to learning and work, to patients before and after they are discharged from acute psychiatric units, is therefore likely to be crucial to the effective implementation of a social inclusion mental health policy.

Social inclusion and recovery

There is also potential for professional guidance services to contribute to the recovery model which is coming to prominence in UK mental health services and is identified by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2002) as one of the factors that makes social inclusion a key policy and practice priority. The recovery movement emphasises the person living the life they have chosen in the community. It focuses on recovering what has been lost through mental illness and being a patient (Membrey, 1999). Knight (2000), cited in Allott et al. (2002, p6) defines recovery as 'a subjective experience

of having gained control over one's life'. The model is based on the premise that people can redefine themselves and move beyond their illness while still experiencing distress. Clients with serious mental illness are assisted to find their own meaning for their experience of mental distress; to find 'a way through', focusing on strengths rather than impairments in order to re-establish a sense of purpose and a role in society (Allott *et al.*, 2002). This approach involves the development of self-awareness; coping strategies, for example managing side effects of medication and symptoms; and professional and community support systems, rather than traditional rehabilitation programmes. Working for inclusion therefore involves the mental health services in acting as catalysts for community partnerships aimed at promoting inclusion.

Sayce (2000) maintains that this process of recovery is only feasible if opportunities for inclusion are developed and appropriate support is available. Recognising the active citizenship 'rights' of individuals is therefore central to enabling people with mental health issues who seek opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to society.

The philosophy underlying the recovery model has links with approaches taken by many career guidance professionals who work with adult clients in considering the multiple dimensions and interconnected aspects of their lives and how these influence their views of the future. Further, a systemic, holistic approach that engages the guidance practitioner in working not only with clients, but also in actively building bridges to local opportunity providers in education, employment and training has potential to contribute to the work of Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) and other key support workers.

Opportunities for inclusion in work and learning

Adults with mental health disabilities are among the most marginalised and stigmatised by society. At any one time, 1 in 6 adults will experience some kind of mental health problem (Office for National Statistics, 2000) yet, although there appears to be some positive change in attitude towards mental health within workplaces (Warner, 2002), people with mental health issues continue to experience problems in accessing opportunities for entry into the labour market. Only 21% of adults who regard mental illness as their main disability are in employment – the lowest rate for any group with disabilities (Office for National Statistics, 2002).

Work is a means by which many individuals are connected to society and its values (Clark, 2002, Evans & Repper, 2000). It provides structure, purpose, access to social contact, a sense of identity and well-being. For many people with mental health problems it is also an important recovery and coping mechanism. In addition,

participation in work activity can have long-term beneficial effects on clinical outcomes such as symptoms, medication compliance and relapse rates (Membrey, 1999).

Further, there is evidence that people with long-term mental health problems can work effectively given appropriate support and adjustments (Sayce, 2000). Bond *et al.* (1997), in a review of US studies of supported employment for people with severe mental illness, found that many studies showed that clients were able to sustain their employment, challenging the view that paid work is not a realistic goal. The effects of a particular mental health problem differ between individuals, therefore using a person's diagnosis as the sole determinant of their readiness to work is likely to be inaccurate (Ford, 2003). Membrey (1999) notes that very few studies have linked either diagnosis or severity of impairment with employment retention and there is a lack of evidence to support the assumption that efforts should be focused on enabling those with fewest symptoms to access work. The desire to work, interpersonal skills and work readiness are among the factors that are more significant in predicting success at work for people with severe mental health problems (Evans & Repper 2000).

Many of the benefits associated with employment are also experienced by mental health service users through volunteering, include improvements in health, stamina and confidence; feeling valued and supported; providing access to a social life and a reason for living (Clarke, 2003). It also provides an informal network for job searching and a 'stepping- stone' into employment for some volunteers with mental health issues.

Engaging in learning in its many forms, whether accessed through volunteering, formal or informal education, employment or training, has the potential to have positive effects on mental health and well-being. Those who experience mental health difficulties, however, often lack self-confidence and can feel isolated from the specialist support, advice and guidance they may need to access appropriate learning and career development opportunities.

Approaches to social inclusion

Many in the mental health field recognise the importance of promoting access to employment in order to advance social inclusion (Mind, 2002). Mental health services have responded in a variety of ways to the social inclusion agenda. For example, Lewisham and Guy's Mental Health Trust, cited in Sayce and Morris (1999), worked on the premise that, with appropriate support and training, employment for all can be an option. The Trust developed a partnership approach to providing service support dependent on need, which included building the capacity of non-mental health agencies to work with people with mental health problems and support them into learning and work.

Further, research by Butterworth and Dean (2000) has demonstrated the value of starting this process of accessing learning and work by clients with severe mental health problems during their time in the acute unit context. Their approach involved primary health care staff (as part of a Work Development Team) in providing vocational advice, with the option to refer to outside specialist learning and careers advisers. The findings indicate that patients benefit by seeing a reason for other ward activities and become ready for engaging in the process of learning on discharge. However, NIACE (James, 2001a) points to the potential difficulties associated with making contact with 'hard-to-reach' learners in healthcare settings where healthcare staff may be resistant to promoting learning as a vehicle to well-being and may lack knowledge, or have out-dated experience of adult, community or further education opportunities. The NIACE 'Prescriptions for Learning' service provided a Learning Adviser, seconded from the local Careers Service to GPs' surgeries. He worked closely with healthcare staff resulting in them referring patients to him for 'on-site' information, advice and guidance, which enabled many of these adults to move into learning (James, 2001b)

The Learning a Living Project

The Learning a Living project, funded in 2002/03 by Sussex Learning and Skills Council[1], aimed to combine the strengths of NIACE and Butterworth *et al.*'s approaches by piloting an information, advice and guidance service about learning and work within two acute psychiatric units. It employed a professionally qualified career guidance practitioner as a Learning Adviser who aimed to work in partnership with hospital staff to provide an on-site, independent and impartial service to patients. The Learning Adviser also set up post-discharge support into learning and work for those patients who requested it.

Method

The research aspect of the project comprised:

- Semi-structured pre-service interviews with 10 hospital staff working with acute unit patients to explore their perceptions of the support and help currently available to patients and their views about the proposed Learning a Living service. 8 of these staff also participated in a post-service evaluation.
- Questionnaires completed by 30 patients prior to the introduction of the service, which explored their experiences of work and learning; views of the future and of the services that they would find useful.
- A reflective journal compiled by the Learning Adviser throughout the lifetime of the project recording observations, critical reflections, insights

gained and actions taken during the development and provision of the service.
- Researchers from User Q, a mental health user-led monitoring and evaluation group, conducted evaluation interviews with patients who had accessed the service. 16 service users were interviewed 2 weeks after their initial formal interview with the Learning Adviser and 11 participated in a second interview 4 months later.

Key findings, challenges and opportunities

A number of key findings emerged from the data collected through the course of the project. Commonly held views were expressed by hospital staff, service users and the Learning Adviser concerning various aspects of the service and suggestions were made to develop and improve the service:

Contributing to the recovery process

An aim of the Learning a Living service was to contribute to the recovery process by making available opportunities for patients to reflect on the past, consider the present and anticipate possible futures with the assistance of the Learning Adviser; and further, to enable patients to access learning and work by building bridges to local providers in the education, employment, community and voluntary sectors.

The recovery model differs from a medical model of mental health in its interpretation of the term 'recovery'. In the medical model, the notion of illness is central and recovery equates to 'getting better' or 'being cured'. This would imply delaying access to guidance until the patient was 'well' and able to benefit from it i.e. as close to discharge as possible. In contrast, the recovery model constructs the concept as a continuous process or journey of recovering meaningful lives through, for example, finding purpose, restoring hope, taking control, and experiencing success (Repper and Perkins, 2003). This model would imply making the service available to patients throughout their time in hospital as it might contribute to the recovery process itself, for example, by enabling patients to reflect on the place of learning or work in recovering their lives and to develop hope through planning and accessing activities of relevance, interest and importance to them both prior to and after discharge.

Patients with severe mental health issues were not found to be disinterested in the service or incapable of reflecting and planning with the Learning Adviser whilst in the acute unit. Some who participated in the evaluation reported that they had used their time in hospital to reflect upon their experiences and to consider their future:

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1 Copies of the full report are available from Lewes District and Wealden Mind, 47 Western Road, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1RL.

'I had been thinking it over... I'm just reassessing my life. I'm coming to this point in my life when everyone is judging me. I'm at an apex. Now what shall I do? Otherwise I would be sitting in my flat creating electronic music or doing Photoshop on the computer'.
(service user 1A)

Others referred to the effects of their episode of mental distress on their recovery before accessing the Learning a Living service which had acted as a source of hope and motivation, for example:

'I wasn't really thinking about doing anything because I had lost my will to live. You don't really think about starting up again' (service user 1B)

Planning for the future involved some service users in exploring with the Learning Adviser their work plans in the light of their current mental health. For example, one service user discussed recovery in terms of regaining control by avoiding pursuits in the future that had previously caused him to suffer undue stress:

'...I was doing a maintenance job...that was very stressful, because I'm not a tradesman at all and it was a nursing home...I ended up responsible for all sorts of things ...they'd call for "Jim'll fix it" ...sounds silly now but it was quite stressful' (service user 1B)

Hospital staff also noted an improvement in confidence and motivation by patients who had used the service, with an increased interest in taking part in learning opportunities provided in the hospital. For example, one patient aimed to develop writing skills at a creative writing group in preparation for an essay-based mainstream course on discharge; others aimed to recover their concentration through activities such as gardening, as an initial step towards re-engaging with learning. Making a connection between learning activities available in hospital, and personal future goals identified with the Learning Adviser, may therefore provide a focus and purpose that encourages some patients to embark on developing specific skills in hospital or to gradually recover that which was lost.

Service users and hospital staff valued the introduction of this service. Hospital staff interviewed anticipated that it would provide a source of motivation and focus for patients; access to specialist knowledge, and contacts into learning and work that their own role could not accommodate. Most of the potential service users surveyed felt that specialist individual information, advice and guidance would be helpful at this time to enable them to consider their future. The evaluation by staff and patients supported these expectations and hopes in many respects. A number of service users interviewed had gained confidence:

'[The Learning Adviser] pointed me in the right direction straight away...I feel good about it...it has made me more positive' (service user 1A).

'...the meetings with [the Learning Adviser] has given me purpose...I'm just not the same person at all. A life altering experience...it gave me a huge boost in confidence' (service user 2A).

The evaluation study reported that the Learning Adviser was regarded as a source of motivation by most of the service users interviewed. They considered the advice and guidance to be appropriate and were implementing their personal action plan. A range of learning and work opportunities had been accessed including paid employment, mainstream education, training, voluntary work, a day centre and a sheltered workshop.

These findings mirror those reported in the NIACE project undertaken in GPs' surgeries:

'...the learning starts as soon as the client sees the learning adviser. Clients appreciated spending time with the learning adviser and reported feeling better for having been listened to and supported. They also felt more optimistic about their future as a result of talking about their concerns and discussing and developing possible options or learning opportunities.' (Slaney, 2001).

Accessing the Learning a Living service

It emerged early in the pilot on both acute units that the provision of publicity (through ward meetings, posters and fliers), together with access via a drop-in centre and/ or through an appointments system, were insufficient. In response, the Learning Adviser introduced a more proactive approach, spending time on the wards in general conversation with patients about everyday matters and in taking part in shared activities. Patients who participated in the evaluation expressed a range of views concerning access. Some accessed the service after reading the literature, although most had wanted to identify or meet the Learning Adviser in order to decide whether to use it. Building in opportunities to engage with patients on an informal basis enabled the Learning Adviser to establish a level of trust, for example by addressing patients' commonly expressed concerns and suspicions about his role in relation to hospital staff and Government schemes.

The proactive approach resulted in a gradual increase in demand. A total of 56 patients engaged in one or more formal[2] interviews and 75 informal interviews were held during the lifetime of the service (available for 1 day a week for 6 months on one ward and 8 months on a second).

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2 Formal interviews provided patients with the option of constructing a written personal action plan with the Learning Adviser, whereas the outcomes of the informal interviews were not recorded.

A professional, independent service

All staff and many service users interviewed identified the independence and impartiality of the Learning Adviser as a particular strength of the Learning a Living service. Staff felt it filled a gap in service provision. Prior to the introduction of the service, hospital ward staff described addressing patients' issues concerning future learning and work in a variety of ways. The provision of advice was reliant on the initiative of individual staff, who described this as giving general advice; making links with outside agencies; drawing on their limited knowledge of suitable opportunities to advise patients; and referring them to the CMHT or an assertive outreach team. Many expressed concern about lacking the time and resources to deal with issues beyond the immediate and practical when discharging patients. They felt ill-equipped professionally to provide specialist knowledge or contacts to opportunities in learning and work.

Staff also felt that some patients would not want to discuss their future with hospital staff who were in charge of their current care and treatment. They also regarded it as important that the Learning Adviser was not associated with the care and treatment of patients, yet worked with the staff team. The Learning Adviser sought to achieve this balance, which included communicating his professional independence to service users and enabled him to form relationships with patients on a different professional basis to hospital staff.

The perception of the service as independent of the provision of care and treatment by hospital staff has implications for whether the Learning a Living personal action plan should be incorporated into care planning. Including employment as a key aspect within every service user's care plan is suggested by Evans & Repper (2000) as a needed development. It would appear a logical next step for the Learning a Living personal action plan and discharge/care plan to be brought together to provide further coherence to the discharge process and support into the community for those who have access to a key worker. However, this study indicates that how this integration is managed may need to be carefully considered if the independence and impartiality of the Learning a Living service is to be maintained. It may be important to do this in a way that avoids patients acquiring the misperception, expressed by one service user in the evaluation, that participation in the Learning a Living service is a required element of the care planning process with which they should comply.

Continuity of support

The Learning Adviser worked to make and maintain contact with local opportunity providers and invested time in visiting schemes and in establishing referral processes. He also built links between key mental health workers and opportunity providers. For example, with the consent of individual patients, the Learning Adviser informed both a day hospital nurse and an opportunity provider of each other's involvement, which resulted in a more effective system of co-ordinated support to the patient.

Some patients reported that the service had responded to their needs for continued support; however, a need to ensure that continuity of the service for patients was sustained after their discharge from hospital was also expressed:

> 'I raised the issue of continuity and facilities were made to streamline the transition from careers advice to applying for work. I would like this continuity built in for everyone' (patient service user 1D).

The Learning Adviser role therefore could be further extended to include facilitating the formation of effective links between practitioners who support patients with severe mental health issues on discharge and local opportunity providers. Increasing demand for the service could result in limits on the time available for the Learning Adviser to take on a substantive follow-up role. As such, it may be useful for the Learning Adviser to explore with individual patients sources of support, including CMHTs and key workers that they could access when implementing their personal action plan. The opportunity to review their plans for the future might also be anticipated and facilitated by providing links to Learning and Skills Council funded information, advice and guidance (IAG) services which they may access within the community.

Conclusions

If those with severe mental health problems are to move from the margins into the mainstream of society career guidance practitioners face challenges including developing services that are accessible and valued by patients, NHS mental health staff as well as opportunity providers.

The findings from this preliminary study indicate that an opportunity to reconsider the future, discuss aspirations, possibilities and steps forward, with an independent specialist guidance practitioner may make a positive contribution to the process of recovery, for example through providing a focus and purpose for some patients with severe mental health issues to re-engage with learning. The Learning a Living pilot further suggests that a proactive, informal approach by the adviser may be an effective means of developing understanding, trust and rapport with some patients who can then make informed decisions concerning accessing further aspects of the service. This requires a commitment to providing a non-discriminatory, client needs-based service in which sufficient time and resources are allocated to implementing a developmental approach to career guidance with this client group.

The introduction of changes in mental health service policy and provision through the National Service Framework (DoH, 1999) required a response by NHS Trusts that will actively address discrimination and promote the social inclusion of people with mental health problems. The challenge to develop a service that enables patients in acute psychiatric units to consider learning and work might be addressed by extending the range of specialist services with which NHS Trusts have traditionally worked. This could include inter-agency collaboration with those that are able to offer 'on-site', independent and impartial learning and career guidance, and who have direct links with employment and learning opportunity providers, including voluntary agencies, community groups, mainstream educational institutions and local training providers.

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Challenging Culture: Meeting the Career Education Needs of Muslim Girls

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Abstract

For many Muslim girls, decisions about career, opportunity and progression are closely intertwined with family, culture and religion. Choice is often mediated by a sense of collective belonging and responsibility, and this may far outweigh any individual aspirations for members of this group. Yet much career education material continues to focus on the individual, and is presented in a culturally neutral way. This brief article explores ways in which Islam generally impacts on the lives of Muslim girls, and argues that cultural understanding is essential if career education is to be both accepted and effective. The rationale behind the development of a career education pack focused on Muslim girls is discussed, an overview of the pack provided and potential challenges explored.

Career, culture and Muslim girls

There is much evidence to suggest that Muslim girls face significant challenges in western society. Not as a result of their own culture and religion, but often due to the expectations that are held by 'others', particularly those of the majority culture, as to how individual lives should be lived. Ed Solh and Mabro (1994) observe that:

'Muslim women in the Western mind... all too often tend to conjure up a vision of heavily veiled, secluded wives, whose lives consist of little more than their homes, their children, and the other women in the harem or immediate kinship circle.'
(cited in Jawad & Benn, 2003:9)

As Muslim girls seek to find their own pathways in western societies, and learn to manage their lives in relation to an Islamic context, 'they are having to do this in an environment where there is widespread racism and, more specifically, mistrust of Islam and Muslims' (Nielsen, 2003). This mistrust and ignorance about Islam, public perceptions about the ways in which religion permeates and informs Muslim communities, and the 'liberating' zeal of some sections of the majority population who wish to 'free' Muslim women (Jawad, 2003), has a tendency to obscure the realities of Muslim life in Britain. This is not to suggest that *some* Muslim women do not experience oppression, however to generalise this view and apply it to *all* denies, 'the relevance of issues such as the centrality of Islamic spirituality or Islam as an issue of identity to Muslim women'(Jawad, 2003:13; Barker & Irving, forthcoming). Moreover, in many Muslim communities there is a cultural and collective cohesiveness (Parker-Jenkins, 1995) that attempts to transcend the imposed individualistic and materialistic values common to the west.

This article reflects the assertion by Parker-Jenkins *et al.* (forthcoming) that:

what is being argued for here is a right for *all* ethnic groups to be equal *and* different, to participate in the majority world, but not at the expense of their own collective sense of being, as reflected in their cultural and/or religious affiliations.

Putting culture into career education

In Britain, the trend in career education has been to focus on the provision of programmes that are universally applicable, centred on the needs of the 'majority' pupil population, and principally reflecting western values. This is evident in the national careers education curriculum framework (DfEE & NACGT 2000), and the DOTS model developed by Law and Watts (1988) which still exerts significant influence. However, when generic career education programmes are developed and delivered for all, regardless of cultural diversity, two questionable assumptions can be identified. Firstly, that the needs of pupils will be best served by ensuring that all have equal access to *the same* curriculum and resources. Secondly, that the *pupils themselves* will be able to culturally translate their learning and the messages transmitted concerning choice, opportunity and progression. However, if this well-intentioned 'colour blind' perspective (Wrench, 1992) is to be overcome, career educators will need to be proactive in their consideration of the cultural dimension of career education, and how this may impact differently on diverse student populations. It will also be necessary for them to develop career education programmes, materials and practices that are appropriate and sensitive for use with pupils from minority cultural-religious groups, and ameliorate wider family and community concerns.

With regards to the career needs of Muslim girls in particular this is no easy task, and to simply assume that *all* career educators possess the knowledge, skills and resources to adapt existing programmes belies the complexity and depth of understanding that will be required. Muslim girls do not inhabit a static world, but are engaged in a continuous process of shaping and reshaping their individual and collective identity and sense of self (Barker & Irving, forthcoming). They experience competing cultural traditions and values, yet for many their post-school opportunities are shaped by family, community and culture, which in turn continues to be significantly influenced by religion.

Therefore, if career educators are to work effectively and meaningfully with this group of young people, not only do they require the teaching materials and resources that are culturally appropriate, they must also feel comfortable and confident when working with pupils who may hold values and beliefs that challenge their own. This requires career educators to gain some insight into Islam, an understanding of how women position themselves within local Muslim communities, and the creation of opportunities to engage directly with family members who are likely to exert particular influence over any choices to be made. Ibrahim and Arredondo (1986) argue that:

'Understanding the client as a cultural entity implies an understanding of the clients philosophy of life, beliefs, values, and assumptions in the context of his or her primary and secondary cultures and in the context of the larger social system... (p.350).

Whilst their discussion is concerned with the need for ethical standards in cross-cultural counselling, what they have to say is equally applicable to those working within career education.

Shifting careers: delivering culturally sensitive provision

In earlier research which explored the career guidance needs of Muslim girls (see Parker-Jenkins *et al.*, 1999), we identified that much career education provision is based on western and Anglocentric views of the world that give primacy to the individual, often in isolation of any cultural context. From this work we developed a framework that sought to illuminate the position of Muslim girls, identifying three aspects that impact on 'being a Muslim' within contemporary western society:

1. that there are common influences which affect *all* clients living in a western society, whatever their own cultural and religious backgrounds;

2. that how clients are affected by, and interpret, these influences is unique to their own cultural setting;

3. that for each client individual characteristics, including the perceived relative importance of personal characteristics as against cultural-religious affiliation, act to influence them. (Irving *et al.*, 2003:118)

It is the second premise that has informed our work in the development of the Muslim Girls' Careers Education Pack (Irving *et al.*, 2003). Recognition is given to the profound impact of culture and religion on the ways in which many Muslim girls construct their present and future lives (see Barker & Irving, 2003). As Baroness Udin writes in her letter of support for the 'Pack':

'Acknowledgement of one's faith is acknowledgment of one's whole life... Any reference to 'culture' must ensure that it recognises the importance of parental and family involvement, as well as the possible impact of islamaphobia which will inevitably arise in the workplace in later life'.

Islamic communities in Britain can be seen to exist on a continuum, with radical Muslims at one end who tend to have relatively fixed views, and at the other liberal Muslims who have primarily embraced a western way of life. As such, there are many families who occupy the 'middle ground' where career interests are understood in relation to Islamic belief, yet mediated by local cultural and community mores. Such families generally demonstrate a deep commitment towards their daughters' best interests whilst seeking to protect them and safeguard their futures (McIntyre *et al.*, 1997). It is this particular (majority) group of Muslim girls' that the 'Pack' targets.

The development of the 'Pack' was funded by CfBT, an educational charity, and seeks to provide culturally appropriate career education materials that can be used in schools, within communities, or used in 'alternative' settings such as youth centres. It was devised and developed by a team of Muslim and non-Muslim career advisers, educationalists and academics. Advice was also received from a Muslim scholar to ensure that the material reflected an Islamic perspective; a number of head teachers concerning its applicability; and representatives from a range of Muslim communities with regards to its relevance. Key aspects of career education that were likely to encompass a cultural dimension were identified and located within a Muslim context. The 'Pack' therefore is comprised of four key components:

* Notes for career educators which provides a rationale for the pack, an overview of ways in which Islam influences the career choices of Muslim girls, suggestions for how the material might be utilised in a range of situations, a brief list of national contacts/ organisations, and suggested further reading.

* Detailed lesson plans and comprehensive supporting materials for the following year groups:

Year 9: Self Awarenss
        Decision making
        Value of work

Year 10: Influences on career choices (2 sessions)
        Qualities and skills
        Who can help?

Year 11: Decision making
        My rights
        Coping with change

- A number of photographs/overhead transparencies along with individual profiles of Muslim women in a range of work situations that can be used as case studies to stimulate discussion within the sessions outlined. They might also provide role models that demonstrate career possibilities to Muslim girls/ families, or be used more widely to support equal opportunities sessions within the curriculum.

- The 'Careers Guide for Muslim Parents and Family Members' can be used in conjunction with the career education programme, or as a separate stand-alone resource. This 'Guide' seeks to enable Muslim parents to be informed about, and become involved in, the career education process that their daughters are experiencing. Along with an introductory letter written by the Muslim members of the development team, and a number of suggested strategies as to how the 'Guide' might be used, four leaflets are included that cover the following:

1. Choosing Year 9 options
2. Work experience
3. Completing and continuing education
4. Options after 16 in training and employment.

Early indications emerging from an evaluation of the Pack suggest that this is a valuable and welcome resource as there is currently little career education material available that is sensitive to the needs of Muslim girls. Those who have facilitated learning opportunities using various sessions from the Pack report that the material has served to stimulate the pupils, enabling them to relate the specific career-related issues to their own personal experiences. Whilst some non-Muslim facilitators felt concerned that their lack of knowledge about Islam would hinder their ability to deliver effective sessions, this has been overcome by others by utilising the pupils own understanding of their religion, how it impacts on their culture and how it informs family values. Through this, non-Muslim facilitators have been able to explore issues and encourage their students to engage in career discussions directly with their families.

A key aspect of concern identified by staff in schools where Muslim girls were in a minority related to the potential 'singling out' of particular groups. It was felt this might result in Muslim girls feeling 'segregated', with non-Muslim pupils feeling they were 'missing out', or that Muslim girls were receiving 'favoured treatment'. This issue is of particular importance as it reflects the whole debate around notions of differentiation and targeted provision. Such provision however has become tainted with a negative image, with the benefits of selective curriculum choice undervalued. Yet if the provision of differentiated curriculum is sensitively managed, responds positively to pupil needs, is optional rather than enforced, and is supported within the mainstream curriculum rather being regarded as a second-best alternative, it effectively extends pupil entitlement, rather than restricting access. Irving and Barker (forthcoming) suggest that potential misunderstandings can be overcome through the development of a whole school commitment towards culturally sensitive provision. To ensure that the benefits of this are made clear, career educators teachers, pupils and parents alike will need to be aware of why a differentiated curriculum is offered, supported through open and informed dialogue with all parties. Clearly there is evidence of this already happening with regards to those groups who are considered to be 'at risk' of social exclusion.

Challenges ahead

If the career needs of Muslim girls are to be met it will require career educators to revisit their philosophies, review their current practices, and reconsider the value of offering the same to all in mixed cultural groups. Benn (2003) comments that: 'If respect and cultural diversity is to become a reality for children (MacPherson, 1999) it must first become a reality amongst the professionals' (p.149). It will be essential to ensure that those working within the career education field actively create opportunities that enable them to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which Islam impacts on the lives of those within local Muslim communities. Being aware of our own values, and reflecting on how these influence our practice, will enable us to work openly with Muslim girls, their parents, and members of the wider community. This is also central to the development and delivery of culturally sensitive and focused career education material that is able to meet diverse needs in a discrete and appropriate way. Malik-Lievano asserts that:

'Ethnic and cultural diversity should permeate the total school environment and the curriculum, the materials, the teaching methods, and assessment practices should reflect the cultural learning styles and characteristics of the students within the school community' (2000:12).

It would be unrealistic to claim that the Muslim Girls' Careers Education Pack, and the associated Guide for Parents and Family members will change entrenched attitudes and opinions. However the 'Pack' does make a positive contribution to the development of a socially just multi-ethnic curriculum that responds positively to

diverse needs in a culturally sensitive way. Further, by seeking to avoid any pre-judgement of future decisions that might be made, and involving the family in the career education process, the individual agency of Muslim girls is enhanced by encouraging active dialogue and engagement. Promoting cultural justice is a responsibility for us all.

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Voices & Choices: How Education Influences the Career Choices of Young Disabled People

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Abstract

The changing British society, with new commitments to educational inclusion for disabled people, should mean increased individual freedom of choice and greater chance of participation. However, juggling this with the continuing emphasis on education for the economy brings the danger of new forms of social exclusion, of those who do have different needs and require additional support to take advantage of opportunities and make informed decisions about their professional futures. This contradiction encourages the deteriorating academic and career-oriented foresight of special schools and the inclusion of all disabled students in mainstream education, without providing enough support to cater for the diversity and differentiation it generates. This paper adds to this debate by reporting on the work in progress, of a project funded by the European Social Fund, concerning the educational experiences of a group of young disabled people, still in full-time mainstream or special education. It presents some personal accounts of the young people's perceptions of how their educational environment influences their personal aspirations for future careers and post-school choices. This research strives to give a voice to young disabled people, informing policy concerned with young people, education and transitions to work.

Introduction

The transition from school to work has always been a crucial time in the lives of young people. Students became increasingly aware of career opportunities and vocational pathways during their final years of senior school (Harvey, 1984). How and when such transitions are made can have a major impact on the young person's sense of identity, the kind of person they want to be and their view of the world in general (Hodkinson et al., 1996).

Furthermore, the individual school coupled with the legislative climate at the time inevitably has significant influence on the young people's transitions. Policy and practice, particularly within the school arena, can either support young people's subjective realities or constrain them. Warton and Cooney (1997) found, in their study, that students were unlikely to make optimal choices as they lack sufficient and appropriate vocational information. Other studies (eg. Ainley et al., 1994) have identified a range of external factors that influence young people's career-related choices within schools. These include type of school, subject availability, timetabling restrictions, choices made by friends and eligibility for entry to further education courses.

Where young people have disabilities and require additional support compared to their peers, the choices available to them in relation to academic subjects and future careers may be severely truncated. Despite the U.K. Government's commitment to remove barriers to learning and increase staff training in mainstream schools so disabled students can be educated alongside their non-disabled peers (Department for Education & Employment, 1997; DFES, 2004), not much progress is apparent at grassroots level. Research suggests disabled children have not been given the same educational opportunities, or been expected to achieve the same, as their non-disabled peers (DRC Disability Briefing, 2000). According to official statistics from the Disability Rights Commission Educational Research study (2002-03), many young disabled people in England and Wales feel marginalised and excluded at mainstream schools. Some young people are not able to access all school resources, and may have to forego certain activities and classes. Furthermore, many feel they received insufficient support in school and are discouraged from taking standard educational qualifications required for university entrance (Martin, 2004).

While a number of studies have explored issues relating to post-school choices of non-disabled young people (eg. Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2003; Whitely & Porter, 2004) there is a dearth of work about the educational experiences of young disabled people and how their career ambitions are influenced. Further, there is growing recognition that gaining the views of all young people is crucial for understanding issues that affect their lives.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to report on the preliminary findings of a three year research project funded by European Social Fund, on how young disabled people, still in full-time education, perceive that their school environment influences their subject selection, aspirations and career decisions. For the purposes of this work the term 'young disabled people' defines males and females, aged between 13-25, who are in full-time education (in school or FE college) with physical impairments relating to mobility, dexterity and speech.

One of the intended outcomes of the study is to allow the voices of young disabled people to be heard and listened to, informing policy and practice concerning their transitions within school, and from school to occupational adulthood.

Such research is particularly important now, as the UK Government moves to implement new strategies for supporting the transition of young people into work, and recognises the importance of consulting them about what they want, need and feel. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DFEE, 2001) states that children have the right to be heard and should be encouraged to participate in any decision-making process to meet their special educational needs (Read & Clements, 2001). Therefore, including their opinions in research about their occupational futures seems particularly timely.

Educational environment

Young disabled people in Britain are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to pursue academic subjects that facilitate progression to future careers of their choice (Shah, 2005, in press). This is often related to a number of factors connected with disability and how society reacts to it. Burgess (2003) maintained that despite the ongoing policy drive towards inclusion, mainstream schools are not fully accessible, as those responsible for developing inclusion still think of accessibility in terms of ramps and rails. In her study of disabled secondary school students throughout the UK, Burgess found that their curriculum choices were severely curtailed: 36% of young disabled people she talked to could not study subjects of their choice due to poor access to the curriculum and the disabling environment, including attitudes of teachers.

A survey by the UK government's Department of Education and Science, published in 1989, and research by Davis and Watson (2001), noted that the attitudes of some teaching staff were said to be 'patronising', while others were reluctant to work with disabled pupils. Further, staff's attitudes were likely to be reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of non-disabled students towards their disabled peers. The effects of such attitudinal discrimination amongst peers may be seriously damaging to a young person's psychosocial development. As Haring (1991) argued, peer acceptance is a primary outcome of schooling, with important consequences for the quality of life of students with disabilities. Research on current discourse reveals that low childhood peer acceptance induces loneliness, truancy, psychopathology and suicide (Parker & Asher, 1987), as it deprives children of opportunities to learn normal, adaptive modes of social conduct and social cognition as well as undermining their academic progress.

Due to the access and resource limitations of several mainstream secondary schools, young disabled people often have to move to a school with suitable facilities for disabled people several miles from their home while their local non-disabled peers can make a straight transition to their local secondary school (Pitt & Cutin, 2004). It can be argued, then, that as long as mainstream schools do not embrace the full process of inclusion, young disabled people still may have no real choice in deciding where to continue their education.

Given the unresolved barriers of mainstream schooling, for some disabled students special schools are still a better option. Special schools and colleges have infrastructure fully accessible because they have been designed to meet the needs of this group of pupils. Moreover, academic staff members are usually very experienced at adapting their teaching to meet the individual needs of each pupil. As Watson *et al.* (1999) argued, special schools provide young disabled people with supportive environments, both physically and socially, in which they can explore and develop a sense of self without mainstream barriers.

However, special schools have their own shortcomings and restrict disabled students' post-school options in other ways. Disabled young people who attend the same school from their early infancy to early adulthood are being denied the experiences considered essential for the transition from childhood to adulthood, thus shielded from the realities of society (Barnes, 1991). Mulderij (1996) agrees that the experiences of mainstream situations are essential during school years if disabled children are to develop the skills to function productively in post-school community environments.

Another fundamental criticism of special schools is the limited curriculum offer which prevents students from learning the wide range of subjects perceived to be important to successful economic participation. Furthermore, Jenkinson (1997) identified many special school teachers' lack of training in, and experience of, the secondary curriculum as an increasing handicap as disabled students move into adulthood.

Methods

During the first half of 2004, seven educational institutions, within a city and county in the UK East Midlands were approached to participate in this qualitative study, 'Future Selves: Career Choices of Young Disabled People'. These included two special schools (one with sixth form unit), two mainstream secondary schools, two mainstream sixth form schools and one specialist further education college.

The researcher talked to thirty young disabled people, in special and mainstream education, in order to understand their educational experiences and how they make particular decisions about their occupational futures. The respondents were identified and invited to participate in the research by teachers or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) of the individual school or college. Recruitment of students

was, on the whole, based on the research sample criteria outlined in the research booklet which was sent to each school and college prior to the start of the fieldwork.

The selection of the sample was based on the following criteria: (1) young people with different types of physical impairments including congenital, acquired and deteriorating conditions, and those who are non-verbal and use a communication device; (2) young people with a range of ages from 13 to 19 in schools, and 16-25 if at college; (3) young people who attend special school and mainstream school; (4) young people who are either just choosing their GCSE or A-Level options, choosing to apply for further or higher education or for jobs; (5) young people from a variety of different social class, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The intended sample was of young people who were expected to participate in vocational decision-making, focussing on significant points of choice. These points coincided with the following 5 age bands: 13-15, 15-16, 16-18, 19-25. This also corresponds to the points in time when the Connexions services are available to disabled people.

Interviewing and Life Stories

This research is about giving voice to the underdog in society (Becker, 1966/7): 'people who are often the subject of research, yet whose voices are rarely heard.' It is concerned with learning about the social reality of a group of people with different values, beliefs and experiences. Therefore the means of enquiry needs to be open-ended, enabling access to groups such as disabled people and children. For this, semi-structured interviews were used, with prompts and follow-up questions to generate accounts of the young disabled people's career decisions in terms of why and where they originated, who influenced these accounts, how the young people perceived they would achieve their choices, and what and who might enable or constrain their transitions. They explored factors like disabling barriers (physical, social and attitudinal), impairment, ethnicity, friends, family background, educational opportunities, type of school, and expectations of significant others. Interviews were conducted within the young persons' educational environment and typically lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. With the permission of the young people and, where they were under age 18, their parents, the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

The stories told by the young disabled people were guided by the topic-setting questions, so certain themes were explored with every participant. However, each story also generated sub-themes that the individual participant chose to identify: the aspects of current context they highlighted as significant and the ambiguities and contradictions within and between accounts (Jones, 1983). In this way, stories were both products and processes.

It may be argued that the acquisition of rich quality data during this study was facilitated by the fact that the interviewer and the participants came from the same minority group, that is, both parties shared experiences of challenging oppression, disablement, special education and partial integration. It is likely that this shared culture and background was helpful in accessing potential respondents, building rapport with them, encouraging them to be more open. It also offered a positive role-model, encouraging the young disabled people to ask the researcher questions about her own life, including whether she had encountered similar barriers to themselves when growing up and the coping strategies she used to overcome them. They were particularly enthusiastic to learn how the researcher has achieved her personal and professional choices in a society often perceived as working against them.

However, no research is completely free of bias. It is recognised that the closer our subject matter is to our own life the more we can expect our own world view to enter into and shape our work, to influence the questions we pose and the interpretations we generate from our findings. Nevertheless, as a British Indian professional disabled woman in her early thirties, only part of the researcher's life history resembled that of each respondent, so she still could retain a fair level of objectivity. Also, she kept in mind the danger of assuming too much commonality of perspective with respondents.

Voices of Young Disabled People – Preliminary Findings

The following are some preliminary findings of work in progress. Although formal data analysis is still on-going, a number of themes have already emerged from the interviews with young disabled people in special and mainstream schools. Four of these themes are summarised below:

Transitions

Transitions for the young disabled people in special schools were different from the educational transitions experienced by young people in mainstream school that typically involve a physical move from one school to another between nursery, primary, secondary and sixth form education. For these young disabled people, leaving school at age 16 or 19 was going to be the first major transition for them, and the first time they have to settle and become accustomed to a different environment. Some of the young disabled people had been in the same physical segregated environment from infancy. They used words like 'scared' and 'nervous' to describe their feelings about leaving school. However they also felt it was time for them to leave and experience something new:

> 'you know what I mean, it's just scary, look, I've been here since I was three... And its like, mmm, I'm going out into the big wide world.' (Tyson, age 19, special school)

The post-school options of young people in special schools were limited and likely to be more dependent on their physical needs, relating to their impairment rather than their individual educational and occupational aspirations. Dreams of pursuing a particular career path had to be sacrificed for having support needs suitably met:

> '*I had a few problems I wanted to do beauty first, but er, I had a few problems with the* [mainstream] *college and that… discrimination… they kept just avoiding it, saying that I can't apply…They didn't help a lot so, so I gradually began to like photography… I've been accepted by* [X special] *college to do photography.*' (Fiona, age 19, special)

Post-school options in mainstream school seemed to be more related to students' career and educational aspirations:

> '*I've wanted to do English, not teaching, something involving writing more than teaching I think… I'm hoping to go further away for university in September to Uni [X] because it does the course I want, I've had a look, it takes the grades that I'm expected to get at A-levels… I want to do an English Literature degree.*' (Steve, age 18, mainstream)

Only certain mainstream secondary schools in Britain have been designated by the Department of Education and Skills as suitable for disabled students. Disabled students who attended their local primary school often are prevented from making a straight transition to their local secondary school with peers:

> '*The closest school I could have gone to was [X], but that's er like, a school for able people, fully able, you know what I mean and that's, that's where they went, my friends, my two best friends went there.*' (Mike, age 15, mainstream)

> '*I got more friends at my old* [primary] *school 'cos I knew 'em from when I was younger… I didn't go to um, my local secondary school because there was no access for disabled children. They had steps, just loads of steps!*' (Xavier, age 13, mainstream)

Physical Access

The poor facilities and physical access of mainstream schools were pointed out by many of the young people as preventing them from having equal academic and social opportunities to their non-disabled peers:

> '*I haven't been allowed to go on some of the trips because they're not accessible to wheelchairs*' (Sam, 17, mainstream)

> '*well they went to Germany but I generally didn't want to go, because it would have been hard and everything, I would have done but it was a bit hard so I didn't go*' (Mike, age 15, mainstream)

Several young people considered the physical environment of mainstream schools to hinder their independence, making them more dependent on its non-disabled population. Unfortunately this only reinforces the notion that disability is a personal tragedy and disabled people are different, dependent on, and passive recipients of, other people's charity:

> '*the bad thing is that I, I have to wait for people to open the door unless I try and do it myself, I can do a few doors myself but not all*'

> '*The setting of classrooms, like where the table and chairs are positioned, I have to always move them to get through… one of my classes I have to sit near the door so I can get out early, but I can't see the board.*' (Mike, age 15, mainstream)

The young people mentioned that the lifts in the school often broke down or had problems, making them late for class, thus both impeding the young people's learning and drawing attention to their disability.

> '*I've been I've been getting late for lessons because of people messing with the lift.*' (Xavier, age 13, mainstream)

> '*I know this sounds a bit weird but instead of lifts in this school, I think they should have ramps… because like lifts go two miles an hour as it is and you get, get to your lesson really really late*' (Nay, age 14, mainstream)

These encounters and the consequences they bring do much to contribute to the process of discrimination and difference. Poor physical access in mainstream schools not only limits the range of subjects young disabled people can choose from in schools, but also impedes their future career and social opportunities.

Friendships and Social Networks

Friends were important to the young people, and often identified as their favourite thing about school. For many young people in special schools, it was often considered the main reason for their choice of post-school placement (to sixth form or college). Some young people in mainstream school felt excluded from social networks, in or out of the classroom:

> '*At my old* [mainstream] *school they* [other kids] *would not be my partner in sports lessons, they thought I can't do nothing and left me out.*' (Noalga, age 15; special, transition from mainstream)

Disabled students often needed to assert themselves - sometimes physically - in order to be included in social situations:

> '*I have to do the chasing about if you like and take them* [non-disabled students] *places and they never really give anything in return.*' (Sabrina, age 14, mainstream)

Work Experience

Many of the students had not done work experience (especially from special school). However they all thought it was a good idea to give them an understanding of what activities they are best capable of performing, and the extent to which these activities will best satisfy their survival, pleasure and contribution needs. Therefore, through this process the young person gets certain experiences that directly influence their career choice and work behaviour:

> 'Work experience will be very good because I don't know what I can do and what I can't do, in a situation of work.' (Zoe, age 17, special)

> 'No I haven't [done work experience] but I would like to... I definitely think it would be helpful... well, because I've nearly left school they [teachers] don't see any point, I'll probably do it when I get to college. Probably.' (Hannah, age 19, special)

In instances where students had done or expected to do work experience, placements were more likely to be based on access and accommodation factors rather than the young people's career ambitions. For example, Nay who is 14, has aspirations to follow a career within the sports or music industry. However, when talking about work experience he says:

> 'I really want to do work experience at X special school nursery to help out, you know, like a nursery nurse.'

The work placement does not necessarily need to always be directly connected to the young people's actual career aspiration to be beneficial to them. Actual work experience can provide young people with critical workplace skills, such as task-approach skills, responsibility and time management skills as can be illustrated by Steve's situation:

> 'I've always had a clear outline of what expectations I get out of it... I want to do an English Literature degree... I want to go into something involving writing... I've had three weeks work experience while I've been here...2 weeks at a special college doing various bits er and bobs there, but mainly to do with building my computer skills more than, more than to do with future career I think... I enjoyed that, it helped skills-wise anyway as I did web page design for three days, C.A.D for few days er, and I did work in the main office for a few days'

Young Disabled People's Ideas for Change

At the end of the interviews each of the young disabled people were asked 'If you had the power to change anything in the whole world, what would it be?'. Their responses have not been analysed but are presented here as a testimony to their individuality:

> 'Change attitudes not disability'
> 'Don't look down on disabled people'
> 'Give disabled and non-disabled young people equal opportunities'
> 'Educate young people about disability within schools'
> 'Change the way me and my friends are all looked at...'
> 'Have ramps instead of lifts at school'
> 'I'd change my dad's opinion about disabled people'
> 'Having disabled people in top jobs'
> 'I'd like to change my chair to a different colour, to purple'
> 'I'd make school more enjoyable by getting rid of the staff and letting the kids run the school'
> 'Have the right help so I can be spontaneous.'

Conclusion

This paper explores young disabled people's experiences and perceptions of educational inclusion, and the challenges and opportunities it produces in relation to their future career pathways. It presents some preliminary findings generated for a three year research project which is still in progress.

All young people face challenges in the transition to adult life, but this study presents evidence, consistent with other research (Shah et al., 2004; Burgess, 2003) that young disabled people face particular barriers to achieving their aspirations. Many have to deal with prejudice and discrimination, are restricted in terms of educational and future careers opportunities available to them, and are constrained from fully participating in social activities with their non-disabled peers due to restrictions imposed by various practices and procedures of individual institutions and, at times, the education system as a whole. Examples such as those presented in this paper provide some pointers to the way in which disabled children can become differentially constructed within a mainstream school. This kind of ritual, and very public, 'othering' reinforces powerful discursive messages in the minds of today's pupils, the employers of the future. Based on a cumulative experience of small incidents, they begin to build discursive categories of 'special needs' or 'disability' that could convey and reproduce power relationships in their future occupational world.

However the categorisation of 'special need' is not avoided by special schools. Some would argue that the practices of special education differentiate disabled students from non-disabled peers in terms of shielding them from the realities of society and denying them the some experiences considered essential for the transition from childhood to adulthood (Barnes, 1991; Shah et al., 2004)

The support systems and barriers for young disabled people outlined in the government's policy agenda may well differ from young disabled people's perceptions

about what facilitates and restricts their educational development and transition to meet occupational aspirations. If young disabled people's needs are to be met, their own accounts are important in developing services.

Services proposing to support young disabled people in their transition to adulthood can make all the difference to what happens to them. If they have information about these services, and support to achieve their goals and to tackle the disabling barriers that others create there is less chance that young disabled people will experience an adult life of dependency and low expectations (Morris, 2002).

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'Oh Whoops, What Have I Done?' Understanding the Changing Guidance Needs of Full Time, UK Resident Masters Students.

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Introduction

In the Winter 2003 edition of *Career Research and Development* we reported early findings from a project commissioned by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), investigating the guidance needs of full-time, UK-based Masters students (Colley and Bowman, 2003). We have been tracking four full time UK students on each of six different Masters courses since October 2002. The 24 students were studying in two universities: one pre-1992 institution we have called Redbrick, and one post-1992 institution we have called Provincial. The courses we drew our sample from were:

- **Vocational courses** linked to or required for a specialised occupation:
  Interpreting – for skilled linguists, to train them in interpreting.
  Applied Sciences – strongly linked with an engineering industry.
  (Both at Redbrick University)
- **Semi-vocational courses relating to a broad occupational area**
  Graphic Art – aimed at those with an established, or those aspiring to establish a practice.
  Business – a 'conversion' course for those who have not studied the subject before.
  (Both at Provincial University)
- **Non-vocational courses**
  Philosophy – mostly students continuing their undergraduate subject at the same university.
  Classics – also attracts mainly students from the same university.
  (Both at Redbrick)

In the first article, we analysed students' career decision-making on entry to the course partly in terms of routines and turning points in their careership (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). We also discussed a more diagnostic approach using Bedford's 'FIRST' model as a heuristic device for understanding students' guidance needs according to their degree of vocational focus and the apparent certainty of their career pathway. Our initial analysis raised the following issues for Higher Education careers service policy and practice:

- resources were scarce in relation to this particular student group and there were enormous differences between the resources available in the two Universities in the study

- the emphasis on careers services as a placement service for employers had a negative impact on the students' perceptions of provision

- the needs of students who were vocationally unfocussed might be better served by allowing them to discuss their perceptions of leaving University before focussing on occupational choice or labour market entry

- career service provision, including websites, could benefit from taking a more needs-based approach that recognises the decision making process, rather than assuming that a decision has been made.

Both in the article and in the interim report from the study we discussed the implications of our analysis of the first interviews for careers guidance practitioners (Bowman *et al.*, 2004). The second round of data, reported here, confirms that analysis, but also takes us beyond it.

This follow-up article is based mainly on the second round of interviews with the students, towards the end of their Masters courses in 2003. In this round of interviews we focused on the students' experiences of the course, the guidance and advice they had sought and received over the year, and their perceptions of formal guidance provision. Here we present tentative findings and recommendations in three key themes:

- The Masters year as period of career transition
- Guidance needs, provision and use
- Implications for guidance in Higher Education (HE).

The Masters year as career transition

The second round of data suggests that the students have experienced the Masters year as a period of career transition. While most saw the Masters, in part at least, as a way to position themselves with more distinction among the general graduate cohort, few had followed linear pathways. For most, their initial expectations on entry did not prefigure how they actually progressed or their planned destination at the end of the year. Moreover, their experience of the Masters course was closely bound up with other aspects of their broader lives. We adapted the typology of 'routines' to this year of transition, and our analysis suggested four groupings in our sample:

1. **Confirmatory and socialising transitions:** for 8 students (mostly on vocational and semi-vocational courses), the Masters year had reinforced their original decision. It had socialised them into the norms and expectations of the Masters course and the labour markets they were targeting, including academia. Generally these students had maintained the Masters as the central focus in their lives, either minimising distractions away from the course, or finding their other interests and commitments coherent with studying their subject area. These students were trying to use the end of their course as an opportunity to progress into occupations related to their course and three of these students had successfully found work.

2. **Confirmatory transitions:** 7 students (all on non-vocational or semi-vocational courses) shared their focus this year between the Masters course and other interests, though both had reinforced their identities. Wider interests and concerns in their lives seemed to have greater influence on most of their post-Masters plans, which were generally tentative and short-term, including temporary or freelance work, or 'gap years' using 'any old job' to save money for a few months in order to travel. Postponement of longer-term career plans was an important feature of some of these students' decisions once again. Some were forced to defer their plans through lack of money for longer-term goals, whereas some desired deferral to allow them to travel, hoping to get a clearer idea of what they wanted to do next. There was some potential for dislocation in these students' interim plans.

3. **Contradictory/evolving transitions:** 5 students (across all types of courses) had experienced problems within the Masters course, giving them a sense of 'not fitting in' and causing them to reconsider their options. All completed their course but took steps to move into other areas, evolving beyond the Masters into new territory. While this had involved a period of unease during the year, these students had pulled their experiences round. They had used the Masters to move on, often by moving away from what they had previously perceived to be a certain pathway, using their other interests as a guide.

4. **Dislocated transitions:** 4 students (across all types of course) had found the year to be a dislocating experience. One vocational student reacted against sexist discrimination she perceived on the course and in the related industry. Others had applied to high-profile graduate training schemes and been repeatedly rejected. Although they enjoyed their Masters courses, these students found themselves unable to reconcile traditional graduate opportunities with their own identities and vague desires for enjoyable and varied work. However, they lacked career management skills and had been unable to resolve these contradictions by evolving in a new direction during the year. All 4 were unclear about their future plans.

Our initial analysis showed that a significant number of students entered their Masters course with clear vocational focus and/or expectations of relatively certain pathways beyond it (Colley and Bowman, 2003). These expectations had been disrupted to a large extent, irrespective of the students' vocational focus to begin with. This implies even greater differentiated needs for guidance in this group than our initial data suggested.

All of the students still hoped to distinguish themselves in the labour market through gaining the Masters credential. In particular, those targeting mainstream graduate jobs were attempting to construct themselves as 'pickers and choosers' in the labour market. They hoped to join 'selector' companies with glamorous products (such as mobile `phones), and to avoid becoming the objects of 'recruitor' companies whose products (such as soap powder) they perceived as 'dull'. Nearly two thirds of our sample viewed their careership predominantly in terms of alternative lifestyles inconsistent with employment-led goals and the mainstream graduate labour market. However, many of the students were restricted through lack of economic, social or cultural capital.

For most of the students, movement into the labour market appeared pragmatic and partial. Even where the Masters courses seemed quite tightly focused on a particular vocation, when compared with apprenticeships (for example) it was clear that employers were relatively loosely involved with the qualification, bearing none of the responsibility or risk for student achievement and progression. There does appear to be a particular labour market for Masters students, but as careers advisers pointed out, it is limited and segmented in technical and specialised areas, both in industry and academia.

Guidance needs, provision and use

It is common for guidance to be focused around decision-making on entry to and exit from educational courses. However, our data suggests that students are engaged throughout their Masters course in a process we have termed 'transitioning'. In coining this term, we are attempting to capture the strategic agency they demonstrate in trying to position themselves

advantageously in various fields. It is key to developing an understanding of full time Masters students' changing guidance needs.

Guidance needs

At the time of the second interviews some of the students who had been vague about their plans at the start of their courses remained vocationally unfocused. They had poor career management skills and had made little or no progress in developing their career plans over the Masters year. Others had hoped that their vocational course would focus and direct their progression but they had failed to do adequate careers research beforehand. These students were now questioning their original intentions, the expectations they held of the course and their desire to work within this particular field. Some had gradually lowered their sights to more typical graduate 'starter' jobs, including the possibility of 'underemployment'. Others had more whimsical ideas about their future options, although these were not necessarily unrealistic, particularly for those from privileged backgrounds with significant capital. Their career hopes were often that 'something will turn up', but most were not well equipped either to generate such serendipity or to take advantage of its occurrence. They displayed poor career management skills, and some were still in denial of the transition they would have to make in the future.

Some students had had clear vocational focus to begin with. The Masters they chose had been especially attractive because of their strong links with an associated industry. However, during the year students discovered just how few openings were available to them. Although the Masters might have been *necessary*, it was by no means *sufficient* to gain entry to desired positions, resulting in considerable disillusionment for some. These students were ill-prepared to re-orient themselves to alternative opportunities. Issues of equal opportunities arose for one female student in a male-dominated field, but she had no idea that she might seek help with these.

A small number of students had found themselves growing comfortable in the academic community. Some saw academia as a safer, more meritocratic environment than the labour market outside education. However, these students found it difficult to get impartial information about how to apply for funding and where to study for their PhD, during the course.

The five students who had been successful in gaining positions by the time of the second interview had either pursued an originally clear vocational focus, or refocused as their transitions evolved. They had made good use of previous work or educational experience and the social capital this had generated along with the cultural capital developed through their educational successes. They displayed well-developed career management skills to pursue these opportunities and to generate and respond to happenstance if need be.

Guidance provision – perceptions and use

There had been no careers education in-put into any of the six Masters courses in the study. Instead, courses focused on providing opportunities for students to build industry, practitioner and academic contacts. However, this varied considerably across the courses. The two vocational courses at Redbrick University brought prestigious employers into the course and provided opportunities for students to network with them and apply for jobs. Applied Sciences at Redbrick was the only Masters course in our sample that provided detailed destinations information for its students and they found this very helpful. The semi-vocational Graphic Art course at Provincial University had provided some opportunities for students to showcase their work and network within the industry. The Business conversion course had provided no support for students' career progression. Academic courses at Redbrick provided teaching experience and PhD study opportunities for a few. For all the students the demands of course work and exams often clashed with career management activity. They found it especially difficult to gear up for the recruitment cycle in November when their courses had only just started.

Careers services had been accessed by some of the students at Redbrick University and by one student only at Provincial University. These students used the service primarily to refine their job application skills, especially writing CVs. The students who used this type of support viewed it positively, and peer example and recommendation were key in take-up of this service. Some students used the careers centre to obtain information about employers, but were less satisfied with this aspect of service provision and those with less focus felt overwhelmed by the volume of information available. Those on vocational courses felt the careers service could not provide the detailed 'insider' information their tutors possessed.

Others had made no contact with the careers service, and several did not know where it was or how to access it. Career guidance was still perceived as irrelevant by many of these students but often for different reasons. For some, one negative experience of statutory guidance provision at school had been enough to deter them from using formal careers services for good. Those who were unfocused continued to see the careers service as only for those who had focused on a clear occupational choice. Those who were already focused relied on their courses, tutors and social networks as more useful. Some of the students who changed direction over the Masters year were faced with a difficult situation and a new set of unexpected decisions to make. The title of this piece is taken from a quote that captures the need one student had to be able to admit that she was questioning her original decision to take a particular vocational course:

If I'd liked this I'd be an engineer for the rest of my life. But I didn't. And I think too many people do something like this and don't think 'Oh whoops, what have I done?' And they end up being miserable alcoholics. I think it happens and I don't really want to go down that route. (Alice, Applied Sciences)

However, Alice would not use the careers service because she felt it was too closely associated with the institution and would put pressure on her to continue with the course or pay back the money. She felt isolated and marginalised. Consequently she floundered towards the end of the year, making plans to move into work as different from applied sciences as possible, without advice or guidance.

Some of the students had used other sources of information. Graduate Prospects and other websites were used to access job vacancies, but had not proved useful so far. Careers fairs were seen as offering too limited a range of opportunities to be relevant. Internet search engines, newspaper vacancy pages, professional associations, email vacancy notification systems and industry-specific mailing lists were used, but also with no results by the time of the second interviews. Family members and friends provided information, advice and contacts, but seemed to have less influence on exit from the Masters than on entry to it.

Some implications for guidance in HE

There appear to be gaps in the provision of career education, advice and guidance from the Masters courses and the careers services at these universities, and in these students' use of available resources. Our sample is necessarily small and the suggestions below should be treated as tentative. However, we have presented these findings to HECSU and careers advisers from a number of different universities, and received strong support for the implications highlighted here.

- Liaison between careers services and course tutors could help develop career guidance provision in appropriate ways. Masters courses could collect and disseminate more accurate and longer-term destinations information. It would be helpful for tutors to understand triggers for referring students to guidance services. Masters courses charge substantial fees, and top-slicing might contribute to resourcing some career education and guidance provision. However, embedding careers education within courses may not be helpful, since such a large proportion of our sample changed direction.

- Full-time Masters students are the one group that policies for funding guidance in HE do not appear to recognise or resource, despite the fact that our sample shows a variety of unmet guidance needs. Careers services may need to pay more attention to marketing themselves to this group, including

better explanations of the needs they can address and the different types of help they offer. Quite small interventions in students' induction might make a significant impact on student use of guidance provision. One interview with a careers adviser who had worked with other Masters students in Redbrick University suggested that students respond positively when guidance is presented initially in terms of an academic and theoretical framework of career theory which may appeal to their self-understanding.

- Branding provision for Masters students may help to signal that their specific needs are recognized. Furthermore an emphasis on the impartial, client-centred role of careers service provision might attract students who are experiencing difficulties, either with their transitions away from their original goals and/or the focus and culture of course provision. There may also be a need for careers services to address issues of equal opportunities and provide support for students who encounter discrimination. Many students are seeking alternative careers and lifestyles outside the mainstream graduate labour market, and have some of the greatest needs for guidance. Holistic approaches to guidance, and expertise on the pursuit of less standard career routes, would equip services to help this group better. Appropriate use of ICT, including needs-based websites and confidential e-mail guidance may also be useful for this group. In both ICT-based and face-to-face guidance, narrative approaches may be particularly effective. This project provides a wealth of case study data from which to develop such material.

Where does the study go from here?

In the second phase of the research, which began in March 2004, we are tracking the students beyond their Masters course, interviewing them again four to eight months after they finished their courses, and once more a year later. We are also interviewing employers and significant others in their lives over this period. We already know from the third round of interviews (across both phases of the study) that many of the students have changed or adjusted their direction again, following the completion of their courses. We will be using the data from the third and fourth round of interviews in the future to discuss the ways in which students progress from full time higher study into work (or not), and how their experiences and use of advice and guidance change over time.

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Notes:

Readers can obtain more detailed working papers and the Interim Report from Helen Bowman at the address below or via www.leeds.ac.uk/lli, click on Publications.

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'E-guidance': Can we Deliver Guidance by Email and What Issues Does That Raise? Recent Research and Evaluation in HE

Marcus Offer, NICEC Fellow

This was the question addressed at a NICEC seminar last May, which involved presentations from Lucy Madahar (Graduate Prospects), Lucy Marris, and Marcus Offer. The following article is based on a document prepared for that seminar, and links to more in-depth reports and briefings referred to here and downloadable from the web site addresses given below.

1. There's a lot of it about. Where once guidance was restricted to a handful of interventional modes and media, ICT has produced an expanding variety of ways in which the guidance practitioner can apparently deliver services to clients – including email, chat, text messaging, on-line discussion, e-learning, web sites and videoconferencing. The UK is probably a world leader in terms of the proportion of guidance users whose needs are being met by email. We have three major institutions, covering the three major sectors of guidance, involved in significant delivery of guidance by email and related media:

- Graduate Prospects had, by 2003, dealt with over 16,000 graduate enquirers by email, an average of 1000 a month, checked over 7500 CVs online, registered over 7,000 graduates to use the careers message board and talk to each other and advisers on-line, and, a late development, organised 25 chat events where a total of 450 graduates talked live to recruiters and postgraduate study experts. The service achieved accreditation against Matrix standards – a first of its kind. Graduate Prospects also funded in the last two years a pilot project to make the software supporting this activity available to local university careers services for their customised use with their own undergraduates, graduates and alumni.

- **Connexions Direct,** a national service that began as a pilot in the NE region and has still to make an impact everywhere, was set up in September 2001 and by the end of July 2003 had helped around 49,000 young people using email, chat, text messaging and the telephone, chat being the most popular medium. Usage has continued to expand significantly since. Over 50% of its enquiries deal with careers or learning issues. About one in four enquiries last year were by email.

- **Learndirect** already has Europe's largest telephone helpline and call centre. It also deals at peak times, with 700 emails per week from adults asking for information and advice on courses, career change, entry to careers, funding for learning, and childcare.

(The figures given here are illustrative and indicative rather than precise and definitive and as the use of the media is rapidly expanding, they should be checked with the agencies in question for up-to-date data)

2. This entails some practical consequences. For example, we may need to accept that a significant proportion of future interactions between guidance practitioners and their clients or students will be via ICT-based media, and that a number of these will be asynchronous and at a distance. Are practitioners able to transfer existing skills from the face-to-face situation into an on-line environment without a hitch or are new skills required? What is the impact of such new forms of intervention on older face-to-face approaches – are they (using Tony Watts' famous breakdown of CAGS) merely additional tools, alternatives to the existing services, or agents of change? Do they require strategic rethinking of the existing services, of the flow of users through a resource system that is now significantly on-line and relatively independent of place? Where do they fit alongside the traditional reception desk and careers library? How should the managers of guidance services prepare themselves and their staffs for the new forms of delivery? Will they be swamped? (Our tentative hypothesis is a ratio of 1 email to every 4 face-to-face interventions). Can ICT offer cheaper replacements for traditional services, which can deliver the cost-effective universal service while freeing practitioners to focus on the needs of the minority of those who really need significant face-to-face help? Or is there actually no saving at all, just a difference in kind, with the same demands for quality, but requiring new skills to deliver it?

3. Yes, but is it guidance? Most significantly of all, perhaps, is the way in which these new forms require a revisiting of old definitions and professional certainties. The views of the advisers who deliver the new services are a vitally determining factor. A significant number of those we surveyed continue to insist that there is some vital element of what they refer to as 'guidance' which is not, and, more importantly, cannot be, delivered other than in a face-to-face one-to-one situation.

Anything less, is of lower value, and while it may count as 'information' or 'advice', is definitely not 'guidance'. Is this a dysfunctional definition of the term guidance, or an important professional insight into the nature of what constitutes 'guidance', the essence of what happens between a guidance practitioner and her/his client?

It is suggested in response that the available official definitions of 'guidance', including the latest descriptions of 'enhanced services', *can* include activities and outcomes and processes deliverable by email and other on-line interventions, that email in particular is a form of intervention in its own right and with its own rules and skills, and not adequately described as a poor relation of the traditional guidance interview. As Lucy Marris says, 'Online counselling is different rather than less'(Marris, 2003). This may entail rethinking some of the management decisions made about where email sits in relation to other resources in the system, including other ICT-based resources, as well as a new emphasis on writing skills. Email itself might offer new training and development opportunities for practitioners including easier supervision.

Given that email has been extensively, if controversially, used in other even more sensitive areas where face-to-face intervention has been regarded as a sine qua non – Samaritans have used email successfully and substantially, especially with young men, and a number of psychotherapists and counsellors now operate on-line, especially in the USA – what is special about guidance that it cannot be done by email? Is the I/A/G definition of guidance really a defensible theoretical breakdown of what actually happens when guidance as an activity takes place in various media and different contexts? Technology, as always, challenges us to revisit and redefine the categories.

Chapter 10 of the report '*Managing e-guidance interventions…*' (Madahar & Offer, 2004) attempts to show that 'guidance' by whatever definition, is being done by email. We suggest that email services can deliver at least some of the outcomes of guidance, and that many of the accepted activities of guidance occur in this medium.

The contrary view may be talking of some of the current practice, but the response is that that simply shows that practitioners have not yet developed the necessary skills and that services have not properly integrated the medium into their current resource system, or developed an appropriate structure to support its use. The *Advisers' Checklist* (Offer, 2004) aims to provide a practical resource to support such training and development and will, it is hoped, be amended as our experience grows to take account of the practical skills being applied in the frontline, and in response to reports from practitioners actually engaged in using email to give guidance.

Nevertheless, as Lucy Marris shows, the objections of advisers cannot be lightly overruled. Some are enthusiastic, some quite the opposite. 'I don't feel confident, but then I don't feel that I want to gain confidence because I don't feel it's the right medium.' Can the irresistible force overcome the immovable object, or is email simply a 'case of the triumph of form over substance?' (Marris, 2003). A tool, an alternative or an agent of change? (Watts, 1996)

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John Killeen Commemorative Lecture 2004
'In Pursuit of A Culture of Evaluation'

Michael White, Policy Studies Institute

John Killeen made important professional contributions through his teaching, through his influential activities in careers education and adult careers guidance, and through his researches, where (among other work) he carried out pioneering studies in the field of public policy evaluation[1].

My discussion focuses upon this last area, and is intended to take forward John Killeen's contribution in a positive way. More specifically it concerns the idea of 'a culture of evaluation', which he advocated in the early 1990s (see Killeen *et al.*, 1992). The notion of a culture has been widely debated in varied contexts, including for example corporate or institutional cultures or community cultures. Most discussions of the concept agree that a culture involves both beliefs (or values), and practices. So a culture of evaluation is not just a system for putting evaluation into regular practice, essential though that is. It also requires belief in evaluation as an activity with the potential to do something worthwhile, a belief which underpins and motivates practice.

The 'culture of evaluation' concept is therefore important in requiring some specification of the underlying beliefs or values which evaluation is intended to serve. This is itself a counterweight to the prevalent emphasis on technical issues in discourse about evaluation. The first half of my discussion, therefore, considers why evaluation is important, what it can do for us and why we need it. It will also be necessary to consider an apparent barrier to setting up a culture of evaluation: the widespread current scepticism about the benefits of evaluation, which in effect denies any value which may be claimed for this activity.

If evaluation is important, the best way to praise it is to practice it. John Killeen knew that it was hard to practice evaluation. The last sentence of the last published paper that he wrote was

> 'Rather than do poor evaluation, we could prepare to do it well' (Killeen, 2004).

It is the word 'prepare' which is particularly resonant with me. To do well what is difficult requires purposeful, long-term development. We must apply a long-term perspective for achieving the goal of a culture of evaluation. Furthermore, the idea of a culture of evaluation - an essentially *social* idea - tells me that no individual will get there alone and unaided. Good evaluation will involve a cooperative effort.

In the second half of this talk, therefore, I will discuss how this development might be pursued - just what kinds of preparation are needed if evaluation is to be well done? I will argue that evaluation will not work fully unless government, the central civil service administration, the research community, and practitioners all play their parts in ways that interlock and support one another. I will sketch some of the practical requirements that, in my view, are needed to make evaluation into a successful social activity, in the long term.

When John Killeen put forward his idea of a culture of evaluation, he was specifically thinking of careers education and guidance. But I see it as having much wider relevance. This presentation is couched in general terms and relates to public policy evaluation as a whole. I leave it to those who work in the field of careers education and guidance, or indeed in other fields of practice, to judge the relevance of the points made to themselves, and to apply them where they can.

Why does evaluation matter?

Let me start with an evaluation manifesto, made up of four interlocking claims which I will subsequently try to justify.

1 Innovation in public services is desirable.

2 There is a need to establish what difference each innovation makes.

3 In public services, evaluation is the only way to get this knowledge.

4 Evaluation matters because innovation matters.

Note that, in drawing up the manifesto in this way, I am focusing on a particular kind of evaluation. There are many other kinds of evaluation which can also be worthwhile in other ways, but the particular type I am considering is that which establishes the gain from an innovation.

Why does innovation matter, specifically in public services? The pragmatic argument will be all too

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1 John Killeen's work is celebrated in *Career Research & Development*, No. 11, Autumn 2004.

familiar. Public services are under intense pressures from a citizenry that demands higher levels of quality but grudges the taxes to fund provision. These contrary pressures cannot be reconciled without innovatory changes in provision and methods. Unhappily, the existence of these pressures is often used by policy makers and policy formers as a kind of threat. Public services are commanded to become more like private services, with the implication that if this does not happen, they will be replaced by private services. These threats are not empty since in many instances public services have been cut or replaced over the past two decades.

But we can surely see better reasons for innovation in public services than compulsion, fear or the urge to survive. Through innovation we can find improved ways of meeting people's needs, and especially the needs of people who, facing difficulties, turn to the public services for help. The desire to improve the well-being of clients is central to the ethos which is shared by public service workers of all kinds and provides a natural motive for innovation. Of course governments or their agencies may want to innovate for other reasons - for instance, to cut exchequer costs or increase economic performance. But aims of that type will never draw together a wide range of public service practitioners in a common culture.

Innovation, even when practised in a positive way rather than through external compulsion, can have a down-side. For instance, it often involves more risk and more stress. We also have to distinguish innovation which has a worthwhile aim from the cynical uses to which it is sometimes put. The point is <u>not</u> to claim that innovation is a self-evident good or an unmixed blessing. In committing to any value, choices and trade-offs have to be made. A group, an institution or a society which chooses innovation for its positive aspects despite awareness of its down-side is on the way to establishing a culture of innovation.

The need for evaluation follows directly from a commitment to innovation within the framework of public service. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which public services profoundly differ from the market sector. Within the market sector, value to the customer is indicated through prices, and this means that business organisations can assess many kinds of proposed change in a relatively simple way, through information about prices, costs and profits.

Instead, public services have to address the value of services to clients in a more direct way, which inevitably varies with the kind of service and the kind of need which it is fulfilling. This is much more difficult, and often messy; certainly it cannot be reduced to a simple formula. None the less we must persist in asking, of any change in service, 'What difference does it make for clients?' Evaluation is the way of answering questions of this sort, and the only way that is consistent with the ethos of increasing the well-being of clients.

Within a culture of evaluation, service innovations would be assessed in a systematic way and it would become possible to acquire learning about the benefits to clients of different types. This would feed back into choices about ways to improve services and practice, and would also stimulate further innovation as the beneficial results of previous changes became more reliably known. So the culture of evaluation implies a virtuous circle between the value of innovation and the practice of evaluation.

Why scepticism about evaluation?

It may seem that, in asserting the worth of innovation allied to evaluation evidence, I am pushing at an open door. The New Labour government, soon after it took office in 1997, emphasized its belief in 'evidence based policy' and, more generally, its desire to implement 'policies that work' rather than policies selected on ideological grounds. Under the governments of 1997 and 2001, much larger sums have been invested in evaluation research than ever before in Britain. Yet it is plain that neither evidence based policy nor evidence based practice has become widely embedded. Instead, I detect in many quarters a growing public and practitioner scepticism about evaluation. Why has this happened?

One problem, I suggest, is confusion. The word 'evaluation' can quite properly be applied to a huge range of activities, from personal judgements to the results of complex social experiments. While there is a great deal of activity labelled evaluation, little of this generates knowledge about what difference innovations make to clients' lives or well-being. Some of it tells us how initiatives are operated or managed, some tells us about acceptability to clients but not about changes in their well-being. Some, regrettably, is what John Killeen referred to as

> 'the 'eyewash' of favourable but superficial description, or the 'whitewash' which obscures faults' (Killeen, 1996a: 331).

Especially, evaluation is confused in the public's mind, and in the minds of many practitioners too, with *performance measurement*. If there is one thing on which the general public and public service practitioners agree, it is that there are too many service targets and too many performance measures. In reality, the public sees only a fraction of the performance measures which public service practitioners now face.

Performance measurement or monitoring does *not* show which changes in policy or practice make a difference to clients. Moreover, performance monitoring systems too easily become sticks for beating, or carrots for rewarding - often entangled with management and staff appraisals, or with battles between local and central managements. One-off reviews, of the kinds often carried out by business consultants, are still more political and threatening. It is this type of situation, and its bracketing with evaluation, which I believe John Killeen had in mind when he wrote

'Evaluation is tangled up in the macro-politics of national resource allocation and the micro-politics of organisational preferment' (Killeen, 1996a: 331-2).

Even when innovation takes place, and evaluation thoroughly assesses the benefits for clients, there often appears to be a lack of connection with 'evidence based policy'. When New Labour came to power in 1997, its flagship programme was New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and the large evaluation effort devoted to this programme was trumpeted to announce the advent of evidence based policy. NDYP was indeed a highly innovative programme which was a worthy focus of evaluation effort. But NDYP was immediately launched as a national programme before any evaluation had even commenced. By the time findings from the evaluation came through, it was too late to alter the design of the programme substantially in the light of its more and less successful features. One or two years devoted to piloting the major features of the programme in various combinations would have provided a wealth of evidence on which future policy towards young unemployed people could have been based.

It can of course be argued that the new government was justified in launching immediately into a large initiative which, quite apart from its direct effects on clients, would set an innovative tone for its time in office. However, the story of NDYP is not an isolated one. Other labour market and educational programmes have been introduced in pilot form but greatly extended or rolled out into national programmes before the evaluation evidence was in, and in some cases contrary to the evidence itself. For instance, one could point to the decision to introduce a national programme of work-focused interviews for lone parent benefit claimants, before completion of the pilot evaluations and despite rather negative results from those evaluations[2]. In the face of events such as these, scepticism or even cynicism about evidence-based policy is natural.

But if scepticism is understandable, it is not altogether just. An agenda of evidence-based policy which is only haltingly underway is a distinct improvement over no such agenda. The lack of policy influence from evaluations such as NDYP has been disappointing, yet these evaluations may provide useful practical lessons that transfer to other programmes in the longer run. There does exist commitment to innovation in the public services and to evaluation, and there is the chance of linking those commitments together in a more effective way. In the second half of the talk, I discuss steps to embed those commitments more firmly in practice.

Steps to a culture of evaluation

To develop a culture of evaluation in practice involves, as I envisage it, four institutional groupings. These are:

- the government in power
- the civil service departments and their agencies
- the research community
- the practitioners who organise and provide services to the public.

What each of these institutional groups does about evaluation affects what the others can do. I will discuss each group separately and in turn, but throughout I am assuming that the eventual aim is a *cooperative* type of development. Broadly speaking, I perceive a current situation where the first three groupings are already engaging with evaluation of public service innovations, albeit imperfectly, but the fourth group - practitioners - remains largely on the outside, or takes on a very small role[3]. Accordingly, the sub-plot of what I have to say is to increase practitioner participation. This step turns out to have great implications for the whole evaluation agenda.

The government in power

The government (by which I mean the political party in power) is and will be in the foreseeable future committed to innovation in public services. Since the early 1980s, bold initiatives have been seen as the way to make an impression on the electorate, and it is hard to envisage any turning away from this.

But it is wholly understandable if impartiality and self-criticism are hard for government. Government is and must be political. It has a natural tendency to inflate evaluation results which declare its initiatives effective, while 'overlooking' evaluation results which say the opposite. Yet a government role is essential in developing a culture of evaluation, not just to secure funding, but also because research which does not engage with government has a diminished influence on policy. The need is to maintain government's interest in evaluation but, through the roles of the other institutional groups, to shape that role to be more accepting towards critical evidence.

It is worth reflecting, for a moment, on how New Labour got to promote the idea of evidence-based policy. Their underlying desire, surely, was to find a way of justifying policies without being trapped in conventional left-of-centre political stances. A 'doing what works' stance protects against accusations of ideological bias to which Labour had long been vulnerable. So evidence based policy offers potentially greater freedom and security of policy choice. But this in turn opens up a debate about effectiveness and delivery, in which all three main

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2 Work-focused interviews for lone parent claimants were introduced nationally from April 2001 onwards. For the evaluation of the pilot program, see Kirby and Riley, 2003.
3 The main exception is in health services.

political parties are now embroiled. It is in engaging with this current discourse about effectiveness that the other social actors can influence government towards a greater commitment to evidence.

Here the media could play a key role, but only if they became more knowledgeable. Manifestly, media reaction has a large influence on the calculations of the government in power and the parties in opposition. For instance, all political parties have become more circumspect about making promises which cannot be funded from current or foreseeable tax revenues, because media commentators have become alert and critical on this point. The media have undoubtedly been 'educated' on this issue by analysis provided by the research community, notably in this instance the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

In contrast, on claims about the effectiveness of government initiatives or programs, the media frequently remain gullible. As recently as September 2004, The Independent reported as a government achievement that 500,000 jobs had been entered by participants in the New Deal for Young People. Yet the evaluation evidence which the government itself commissioned indicates that no more than 1 in 10 of these jobs is additional and therefore attributable to NDYP: the remainder would have happened anyway (see White and Riley, 2002).

A better informed media would challenge the government when it disregarded its own evaluation results. Another incentive for government to wait for the evidence before committing to a policy is that this would render the policy less vulnerable to being reversed by a subsequent government. Evidence-based policy takes longer to create, but should represent a more lasting achievement of the government which brings it to pass.

How might government behaviour change as it became drawn into a culture of evaluation? One possible model is the USA, where economic evaluation has been developed strongly since the 1970s. Most US programmes now start as 'demonstration projects' which are managed, in conjunction with local public service providers, by external contractors who are also responsible for providing or arranging evaluation. Thus the delivery and evaluation of these pilot programmes are at more than one remove from central government. Only when the evaluation results are in - a process which often requires several years - will scaling-up be considered. So government adopts a wait-and-see approach in which it must be *persuaded* of benefits before it commits large-scale national programme funding. In so doing, of course, it also protects itself from being blamed for failing programs. It is notable that the first demonstration projects that follow the US pattern have recently been launched in Britain - most notably the Employment Retention and Advancement Demonstration (ERAD) project. How this project is treated by government will be an acid test of progress towards evidence-base policy.

It will be particularly interesting to see whether government has the patience to complete the project before deciding its policy.

Does this type of development, with the government in power becoming more cautious about its own innovative commitments, imply less innovation? Not necessarily. As government steps back a pace or two, more space is made for other social institutions to innovate more. Contacts that I have had over the years with local agencies and voluntary bodies in the USA (and also some other countries, such as Australia or the Netherlands) have impressed me by the vigour and enthusiasm of their innovative work. The culture that has developed in the USA is one where the centre learns from local experimentation rather than imposing its will across the board. Of course, this reflects a decentralised governance tradition which is different from that of Britain. We cannot copy the US system, but we can draw confidence from it about the capacity for innovation which exists throughout society.

The civil service

Civil service departments and agencies have played a major role in fostering public service innovation and evaluation. For example, in the 1980s the Manpower Services Commission and its successors played an important part in reforming adult skills, with the Employment Service playing a similar role in relation to services for unemployed people (the story is told in Price, 2000). Over the past two decades, HM Treasury has been the chief moving force in establishing the need to evaluate new initiatives and in demanding higher standards of evidence. Departments and agencies long exposed to evaluation have also come to see that an evidence-based culture strengthens their position, since they are responsible for marshalling the evidence.

This background means that the civil service will be, for the foreseeable future, key players in any culture of evaluation which one may hope to establish. But those central departments and agencies which have been leading the way in evaluation need to think more about how they can foster a culture of evaluation which goes beyond their own walls.

One way in which they can do so is in developing what might be called an 'information infrastructure' for evaluation. How can one properly evaluate a service innovation, if one does not record what service is actually delivered to the client? Again, evaluation can be greatly improved if details about the clients, and what happens to them subsequently, can be extracted from administrative records that are created along with the service, rather than obtained through costly (and frequently flawed) special surveys. Such a development democratises evaluation by making it less costly and therefore possible for more people to get involved with and use. Here the news is

generally encouraging, with many steps currently being taken in this direction.

The central administration should also be giving thought to developing a wider capacity for both innovation and evaluation. It is an unfortunate part of the British governance tradition to rely heavily on the central elites. Much of what I want to say about decentralisation will come in the following sections, when I discuss the research community and the practitioner community. But it would help if the central administration wanted to develop the role of these groups and give them space to be independent actors. Again, there are some encouraging signs. In the ERAD project, which was referred to in the previous section, front-line staff serving unemployed and in-work benefit claimants are being trained to play an active role in the experiment, and similar developments are visible in some other demonstration projects and in some community initiatives. Some departments are encouraging practitioners to set up their own D-I-Y evaluation activities and providing advice on how to get started. This at least shows awareness of a need for practitioner involvement.

The research community

In developing a culture of evaluation, the research community has two main roles. One is to establish sound standards and methods of evaluation, so that it can be trusted, while the other is to make evaluation and its results accessible to a wider community of interests, and especially the practitioner community.

While the amount of evaluation which is technically of a high standard is growing, this tends to be concentrated in a narrow circle of specialist research institutions who chiefly talk to each other and to their specialist opposite numbers in the central administration. Evaluation is at risk of developing as a divisive rather than an inclusive institution. Thus, the emergent issues for the research community concern collaboration and interaction with practitioner and research-user groups.

As an example of what might be achieved, John Killeen pointed to the activities of applied psychologists in the USA, who are heavily involved in guidance and counselling practice, often devise new methods to be tried in those fields, and also lead the way in evaluating the effects of those innovations (Killeen, 1996b; 2004). In Britain, however, researchers involved in evaluation tend to see innovation and practical application as the responsibility of the government departments, so that they do not need to interact with practitioners. But it is only through researcher-user interaction that higher standards of evaluation will become accepted and understood in practitioner groups.

An encouraging sign of the development of such interaction is the establishment, in 2004, of the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF), a joint initiative between the Guidance Council, the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, and the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby. The Department for Education and Skills is providing initial funding, which is another indication of growing awareness at the centre of the value of fostering practitioner involvement in research.

There is also a need for the research community to play a part in developing and disseminating evaluation methods which are relatively simple and accessible, yet sound. This would contribute to the aim of practitioners developing their own capacity to evaluate innovations. This is a subject which is too large for me to cover here (for instance, it inevitably leads into the controversial issue of social experiments). But it is worth pointing out that it was with the aim of encouraging practitioner involvement that John Killeen advocated the development of measures of the 'learning outcomes' of guidance. More discussion of this follows in the next section.

Practitioner groups

The purpose of evaluation is to find which innovations make a worthwhile difference, but implicitly we only make this our aim because we want to put those innovations *into practice*. This cannot be achieved without the involvement of those who deliver the services.

In the formulation of new evaluation projects, and in appraising the results through feedback, there is the potential for more practitioner involvement, and this already takes place in some cases. But, from the nature of things, this will nearly always be in the form of practitioner representatives and practitioner experts, rather than anything more widespread. For a culture of evaluation to take hold in a public service, the potential evaluation roles of *all* its practitioners need to be developed.

One of the most important practitioner roles exists even before any evaluation takes place. Practitioners play the key roles in information systems on which evaluation draws, and the potential of this information role has been greatly underestimated. Indeed, lack of appreciation of this information role is one of the chief reasons why a culture of evaluation has not yet developed in most public services.

This can be illustrated with an anecdote. When John Killeen and I designed an evaluation of adult guidance services (see Killeen and White, 2000), we assumed that clients would be recruited into the project by advisors when they first attended, and that the advisors would arrange for these clients to complete an initial questionnaire about their pre-guidance circumstances. However, during piloting it rapidly became apparent that the procedure was impractical. Advisors lacked the knowledge to adapt their normal reception procedure in

this way, and local managers lacked the time or knowledge to train them to do it. Since we ourselves did not have the time or funding to devise training, we had to revert to a research method which removed responsibility and involvement from the front-line staff.

This example is <u>not</u> meant to blame front-line staff or their management in any way. Rather, the fault lay with our own mistaken assumptions, and in a lack of prior training without which staff could not play their part in research procedures. Then researchers devise ways of gathering their data independently, so that the front-line practitioners become excluded from the evaluation process. If this happens in the case of skilled professional staff, as in careers guidance, it is still more likely where the front-line staff have relatively low levels of professional training, as in the case of (say) Jobcentre advisors. But there are some encouraging signs of change being fostered from the centre. In the ERAD project which I referred to earlier, much attention is being given to providing the training which will enable front-line staff to induct clients into the pilots and into the evaluation process.

A related but more complex issue is the embedding of tests or other standardised measures into the practitioner relationship with clients. Anyone who consults a doctor or dentist expects systematic observations to be made and recorded, but elsewhere this often appears to cause difficulty. An example came in an evaluation of innovative provision for adult basic skills courses, another project where John Killeen and I worked together. Part of the evaluation design, as specified by the DfES, was that local educational providers (mostly FE colleges) would carry out pre-course testing, with standard national tests, to establish baseline levels of attainment. This was also to be done in comparable courses which lacked the innovative features. In this way, gains in attainment from the innovative courses could be compared with those from traditional courses. In practice, however, this part of the evaluation had to be dropped since large proportions of learners were not given the pre-tests by their tutors.

This issue of embedding standardised measures is crucial for John Killeen's hopes of using 'learning outcomes' as a way of evaluating innovations in provision (see, especially, Killeen, 1996b). Although he put this forward specifically for careers guidance and counselling, the idea is more general. The example I have just given about adult education obviously concerns learning outcomes, and many other kinds of service - for instance, employment offices, pre-natal advice, or probationary supervision - have learning functions. Once practitioners routinely collect measures of learning outcomes, or similar outcomes that come directly from the service provided, evaluation would become easier and less costly to mount. Equally important, practitioner groups could become more closely involved in the process of evaluation itself, rather than (as at present) usually being excluded from the loop.

However, developing useful and reliable measures of learning or similar outcomes is a far from easy task. Even where learning measures exist, they will not be consistently put into practice if staff lack confidence in them or if they are not user-friendly. If such measures are to become embedded in practice, therefore, involvement of practitioner groups *in the development stages* of the measures themselves needs to be achieved. How tests or other measures are applied in the client setting is an important issue and one where practitioner involvement and feedback should improve matters greatly.

My emphasis on the practitioner roles in information and measurement might seem to confine them to a relatively routine or humdrum position in the culture of evaluation. But this is not so, because the information and measurement roles are only the beginning. One of the results of a public service having embedded measurement is more scope for local or small-scale research, offering more opportunity for practitioner involvement. Consider the health services, which perhaps offer the most developed example of a culture of evaluation. Medical, nursing and paramedical staff learn about research procedures as part of their professional training, and standard measurement and recording procedures are used as a matter of routine. This leads to a situation where a great number of small-scale clinical trials are in progress all the time, and these are widely dispersed around the health services.

It is true that evaluation remains a difficult task, and practitioners cannot grow into a full research role overnight. But if evaluation is seen as a collaborative activity, then there are various ways in which practitioners might combine with researchers so as to develop capacity. There can be researcher-led projects with practitioners as consultants, there can be joint evaluation teams, or practitioners can plan and manage their own evaluations while bringing in technical services from researchers. Hopefully, the central authorities could be persuaded to push more of the funding outward to support such collaborative developments.

Finally, it is important to consider the implications of all this for practitioner involvement in innovation. The capacity to evaluate ideas, and so establish their effectiveness, surely is an incentive to be interested in innovation and, in short, to innovate. A dispersed capacity to evaluate should therefore lead to more widespread innovation with practitioner involvement. This would also tend to produce a more balanced kind of innovation. Alongside the large central initiatives, of which there are perhaps more than enough, there would be a growth of smaller innovations, concerned not so much with the grand structure of service provision, but with the detailed 'how?' of service delivery. In the long run, it may be that these detailed improvements in the methods of assisting the clients of public services will make more difference

than the great changes in the organisation of provision that have been so conspicuous in the past 20 years.

An increased role for public service practitioners in both innovation and evaluation cannot however be fully realised without professional training. Bearing in mind Alexander Pope's famous dictum about fools and angels, I will not prescribe how training should be modified for any practitioner group, let alone for all of them. However, I would suggest to those responsible for practitioner training that they might consider how greater involvement in innovation and evaluation - the R&D of public services – could be fostered within training provision.

Conclusion

In this discussion I have tried to take forward the idea of a culture of evaluation which was originally advocated by John Killeen. In brief, I see a culture as consisting of both commitments and practices, understood and shared between social groups. I then apply this concept to evaluation in the public services.

The first half of the discussion argued that the main point of evaluation is to identify innovations which make a positive difference for clients of the public services. A culture of evaluation would draw its energy from wide agreement that improved services are worth pursuing, and that it is therefore worth finding out *what* makes a difference for clients.

The second half of the discussion concerned the practice of evaluation across the chief institutions concerned: the government in power, the civil service departments and agencies, the research community, and practitioner groups in public services. I have focused on changes in attitudes and behaviour which would help to form a culture of evaluation which links all these groups, and I have emphasised the importance of involving practitioners if a widespread culture of evaluation is to become a reality. What makes it difficult to establish a culture of evaluation is that no one group can accomplish the task. It requires each group to take positive steps while being aware of and respecting the parts played by the others. It is through an accumulation of such positive steps that a culture of evaluation can be built, and as stressed at the outset of the discussion, this is sure to require long-term persistence.

John Killeen's original idea of a culture of evaluation is, I believe, an important one and, as I have tried to develop and apply it, I have come increasingly to see the seriousness of its implications. Rather probably my proposals have not measured up sufficiently to the task, and they are by no means the only ones which might be suggested. I hope that others may take forward the debate in pursuit of a culture of evaluation.

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and, as I have argued elsewhere (Jackson, 1996), studying them can offer important lessons in understanding how careers are changing. Looking at the symbiotic careers of the Almodovar brothers, Pedro (Director) and Agustin (Producer), Alvarez and Svejenova argue that the study of two people working together is often ignored in the career literature, yet is not uncommon in practice. They describe, for example, how the brothers have created their own organisational structure, a production company, to mediate their relationship with the artistic labour market. In the following chapter, Jones reviews how signals, for example through participation in certain sorts of projects, shape careers in many creative industries. How signalling links to reputation building is also explored. The final chapter by Ensher and her colleagues provides a case study of female executives pursuing boundaryless careers in the TV industry. It identifies a number of career-enhancing strategies, such as peer-based learning support networks, used by these women as they pioneer careers in this field. It also illustrates how many of the concepts described in earlier chapters, such as alternative working arrangements, have been used by these women in developing their careers.

The final section of the book presents what are essentially case studies of how the particular careers of individuals have reshaped whole industries. Peterson and Anand, using examples from the music industry, argue that in such a competitive field a handful of individuals pursuing rather chaotic careers were able to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities brought about by changes in technology, the law, and markets to create a whole new industry. Higgins, in her chapter, shows how the emergent biotechnology industry was shaped by the shared career history of a number of individuals who had all worked at one time for a leading health-care company. She argues that not only did they draw on their shared experience of working in a particularly entrepreneurial culture but also gained critical reputation and credibility from that association. This, in turn, facilitated the development of their new companies. The final chapter in this section by DeFillippi and Arthur looks at the career of Linus Torvald and the development and commercialisation of the Linux operating system. They argue that the way Torvald was supported by his peers has implications that go far beyond the software industry itself, and that in the knowledge economy, support networks and linkages of this kind will become increasingly important in the formation of new industries.

In their concluding chapter, the editors argue that the preceding chapters have sought to extend the range of settings in which careers are studied and to explore the creative ways in which individuals are developing their careers. It seems to me that this is about reminding us to be open to new ideas and situations, and also about the value of what we can learn from a more exploratory approach to the study of careers. Careers and working arrangements are changing in many and varied ways

and, if we do not understand these changes and their consequences, not only will we fail to develop our own careers but also those of the people we work with. I hope I have been able to illustrate the range of material that *Career Creativity* covers. I think this book could usefully be read alongside the recent Centre for Guidance Studies Occasional Paper, 'Succeeding Generations: Inspiring Futures for All' which sets out a challenge to guidance practitioners, in particular, to create a new vision for career guidance services in the UK. One challenge for career guidance practitioners must be to make use of the new career concepts and insights outlined in 'Career Creativity'.

Both *Career Creativity* and 'Succeeding Generations' are essentially optimistic in tone. By being more imaginative and open to new ideas, individuals can have more satisfying careers and career guidance practitioners can expand their own horizons about the kinds of services they could offer. It is worth remembering, however, that there is a darker side to the world we live in. Anti-globalisation protestors remind us that world trade is not conducted on a level playing field but operates with a set of rules highly skewed towards the rich and powerful global corporations and the ruling elites in developed countries. Fair trade is certainly not the norm.

In the UK, a new report by the Equal Opportunities Commission, 'Sex and Power: Who Runs Britain?' points out that fewer than 10% of the most senior jobs in public life in the UK are held by women and the position in business is no better. People from ethnic minority backgrounds are similarly underrepresented. There is also plenty of evidence that inequality and social rigidity are increasing rather than decreasing in both the USA and the UK. So managing and developing a personally satisfying career is by no means a straightforward task for most people.

So, while I applaud both *Career Creativity* and 'Succeeding Generations', for their vision, I think that they ignore the larger creative challenge of how to develop and support careers for all. This is likely to require substantial changes in the structure of the global economy. There are broader issues about how we build trust in the workplace as well as within and between societies. This is not to deny the importance of the papers in *Career Creativity* to the careers literature. Maybe an optimistic conclusion is to read *Career Creativity* as offering insights on how, at an individual level, we can respond by being proactive and creative in our approach to the world of work in the 21st century. However, the challenge for career practitioners is not only to support individuals but also to challenge the social context in which careers currently operate. While *Career Creativity* offers useful insights for the first of these activities, we still need new ideas that address the second and, more radical, agenda.

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Contents