



INTERNATIONAL
CENTRE FOR
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STUDIES



Evolving career development practice to remain a sustainable profession

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Overview of session



- Examining the professional identity of careers practitioners
- Case study- 21st Century HE Careers Professional
- Discussion- Evolving our profession

The Career Development Profession

- Helps to locate life transitions- learning/work/life choices
 - What works for the effective life choices for young people and adults
 - Increasing important with changes in world of work
- Informed by a commitment to social justice, inclusion, widening access and raising expectations and life chances
- Attempts to overcome deficits in social and cultural capital to create agency and self efficacy
- Careers professionals work in schools, colleges, universities, prisons, adults in the community, trade unions and private practice....



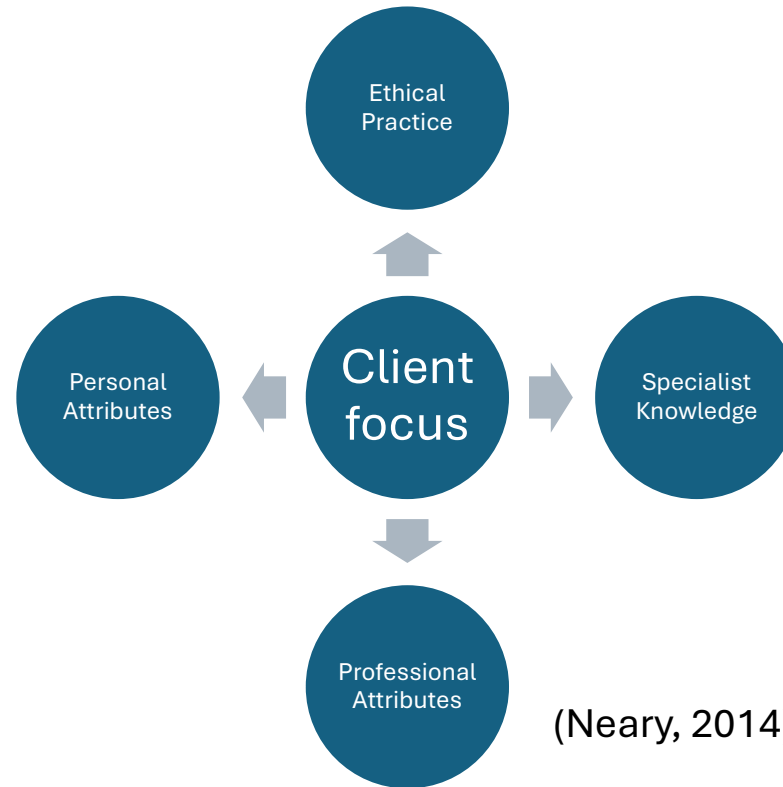
Defining Professional Identity

“Professional identity is the concept which describes how we perceive ourselves within our occupational context and how we communicate this to others”


Neary, 2014



Professional identity of careers practitioners



- Job titles
- Location of practice ie young people, adults, HE
- Initial training
- CPD
- Shared ethics and values
- Communities of practice
- Professional associations
- Networks
- Societal recognition
- Standardised qualifications




5 Areas of focus for Professional Identity (Thambar, 2016)

- **Undefined**- inconsistent requirements for qualification and perceived relevance
 - **Locally focused**- reluctance to be described as an expert, lack of interconnectivity with wider university agendas
 - **Unrecognised**- lack of understanding of role by others, drawing credibility for elsewhere, alternative job titles
 - **Unconfident**- differentiation of qualifications and job titles with other colleagues, reluctance to tell people
 - **Dedicated**- passionate about helping students, commitment to the role
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Researching the 21st century HE careers professional



Thambar, Neary & Zlatic, 2020)



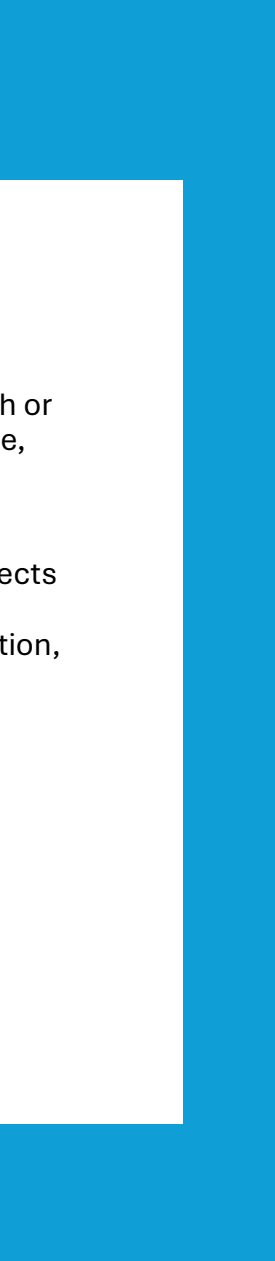
Research methodology

A qualitative study using a constructivist lens

- Data captured from
 - Russell Group
 - Pre 1992
 - Post 1992
 - Specialist HE
- Four stage methodology
 - Literature review
 - Focus group- test out ideas (Three planned only one took place, 11 participants)
 - Survey – 84 responses
 - In-depth interviews – purpose sample, 10 participants




Third space professionals (Whitchurch, 2008, 2013)

- Growing number of roles and services, neither research or teaching, including Student Experience, Careers Advice, Alumni, Recruitment and Access and Outreach (2008)
 - In such environments staff with both professional and academic backgrounds involved in broadly based projects arising from both public service and market agendas, including widening participation, community regeneration, business partnership and knowledge transfer
 - Four categories of Third Space Professionals (2013)
 - Bounded Professionals
 - Cross-Boundary Professionals
 - Unbounded Professionals
 - Blended Professionals
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Demographic data on survey respondents

- 55.9% participants have spent 5-10 years working in HE careers
- 63.1% of participants represented Pre 92 and Russell Group universities while 36.9% work in Post 92 and specialist HE
- 77.4% Female respondents, 21.4% men, one participant preferred not to be identified
- Qualifications (not mutually exclusive):
 - 28.2% Diploma in Career Guidance/Development
 - 20% PG Dip Careers Education Information and Guidance in HE
 - 13.6% Qualification in Career Guidance
 - 9.1% Associate FHEA qualification
 - 20.5% Fellow FHEA qualification
 - 1.1% Senior FHEA qualification
 - 11.4% other teaching qualifications (e.g. PGCE)



How do careers professionals in HE define and describe their role?

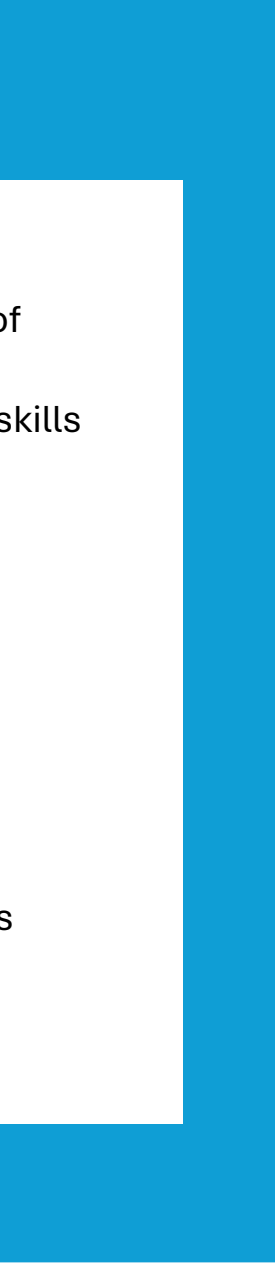
- Most respondents described their role as ‘ supporting’ students in their career development and planning, including navigating recruitment processes
 - One to one - resource intensity but valued
 - Workshop activity
 - Embedded or aligned careers education within the curriculum
- An extension of student facing role into academic consultancy, partnership with academic and senior stakeholders
- Some roles were strategic or project focused addressing institutional priorities
- Focus on employability has resulted in growing number located in faculties or other non CS locations – often contributing to external metrics
- Active engagement in teaching and learning networks is important




What Expertise do Careers Professionals Bring to the HE Sector?

- LMI, insights and connections to the World of Work
 - Guidance/Coaching and individual support skills
 - Professional Skills (including planning, negotiation, adaptability)

 - Student Focus and insights
 - Curriculum development and teaching
 - Impartiality
 - Understanding of Career Theory

 - Ability to help students to develop their skills
 - Ability to liaise with, and advise, academics
- 




How do practitioners feel their role has changed over the last 10 years?

- Those involved in HE for a longer period of time recognised their role had evolved from an **individual one to one focus** to one which also has a **strategic emphasis**
- Responding directly to the **needs of academic departments** ie supporting placements, employability, worked based learning
 - “Some people don’t like the breadth... they like the 1:1 and maybe the odd group session”
- One to one seen as important, but strategic work perceived as more impactful
 - **“Nothing we are recognised for comes from guidance, yet it is the core part of the role”**
- Variety of views on one to one, some feel they are doing less, others more and some feel it is getting harder as students have more complex needs
- Strong focus on employability workshops 62% doing more and 61% working more with academics



How might roles evolve over the next five years?

- Focus on particular student groups
 - Disadvantaged students
 - International
 - Alumni
 - Greater focus on data-driven approaches
 - Expectation to demonstrate impact
 - Greater online capability
 - Flexible online services –
 - Provide greater accessibility for students
 - Evidenced as greater engagement during pandemic
 - Concern that online might result in staffing changes and job insecurity
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What needs to be in place to ensure Careers Professionals are effective?

- A community of practice, access to CPD and practitioner identity were important in ensuring efficacy in practice
- Respondents generally felt that careers was not valued within their institution, particularly by academics. The knowledge, skills and experience of practitioners was not recognised/respected.
- Resourcing was perceived as an issue, many practitioners felt the services needed more staff, more training (IT) and greater LMI
- Better positioning within institutions would help, within SLT and governance positions

“Recognition of the place of the academic curriculum in delivering employability and willingness to explore meaningful ways of delivering employability learning to students”

A changing professional identity

Strongly Agree: 22%

Agree: 57%

Neutral: 16%

Disagree: 5%

“ I feel my identity as a HE Careers Professional has changed over the last 5 years”

Final thoughts from the research

“With increased awareness and focus on graduate employability, our role has increased importance within the University and we are more respected for our professional competence rather than just checking CVs”

“The university has changed its perceptions of careers as being as ‘just about checking CVs’ and regards us as experts and specialists in graduate employability”

“A role shift from ‘individual’ IAG dominance to ‘supporting academics/curriculum’”


“A notion that careers guidance or coaching can be done by anyone after little training.”

“Less consultation and involvement in decisions. More time completing spreadsheets”

Discussion

- 1) How do we help others to understand our work?
- 2) What must we do to ensure sustainability of the career development profession?
- 3) How do we balance our expertise with evolving need?


In groups discuss these questions and outline 5 key points in response to each question.



How do we help
others understand
our work?



Group discussion



What can we do to ensure the sustainability of the profession?

- We need to....
 - Our employers need to...
 - Others (ie Professional bodies) need to...
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Professional identity- International perspectives (Brown and Bimrose, 2019)

Work identities are produced through personal agency, interaction with others, existing norms and discourse- they are dynamic and iterative (2019:766)



Professional identity develops through

**Skill development –
structures and contexts**

Careers – own narrative

Sense making



So what needs to be in place for sustainability....

- People who are passionate about the difference career guidance can make
 - Strong leadership- shortage people wanting to be leaders
 - Consistency in how to talk about our work
 - Evidencing and promoting impact- we change people's lives!
 - Taking responsibility for our profession
 - Recognition and promotion of our expertise
 - What differentiates us from other professions/practitioners
 - Evolving our profession to embrace technology
 - Societal recognition and value from policy makers
 - Coherent and sustained policy
 - Diversification of the workforce
 - Decent work conditions for all
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Selected references

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Thank you

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