

# Careers guidance, identity and development

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## Introduction

Equipping individuals with the skills and understanding required to make appropriate career transitions, as well as supporting them on their journeys throughout life, are critical not only for an effectively functioning economy, but also for individual well-being. If children are properly supported in making their early career decisions, it is more likely that they will recognise the value of continuous learning, make progress towards realising their full potential and lead more fulfilling lives. By facilitating successful transitions into paid employment, high quality careers guidance can also help ameliorate social deprivation and poverty:

Mounting evidence suggests that an individual's level of consumption, self-esteem, social-status, and even happiness depend to a large extent on not just income, but also social status, associated with occupational attainment.

(Brown, Sessions and Taylor, 2004, p20)

Indeed, whilst the funding of careers guidance is commonly justified in terms of its contribution to creating and maintaining an efficiently functioning economy, it could equally be argued that it is justifiable in terms of contributing to the health and well-being of the nation.

This paper will reflect on current careers provision in the UK, consider likely directions for its development and speculate on what could, and should, be. In so doing, the focus of the paper will incorporate discussions of models of careers development that would be necessary to support the more speculative scenarios.

**Keywords:** work, careers, employment, society, deprivation, lifelong learning

## Careers guidance for young people

Successful navigation of the changed and changing labour market is challenging:

As young people move towards adulthood, they face a range of challenges which require them to make difficult life and learning choices. They need help to understand their options and to make informed decisions, especially as we increase the range of options available to young people.

(DCSF, 2007, para 5.15, p112)

The concept of 'careers guidance' (or information, advice and guidance (IAG)<sup>1</sup>), is relatively new. It has been argued that each time the social organisation of work changes, so do society's methods for helping individuals make vocational choices (Savickas, 2008). Methods of helping individuals make successful transitions from education into and through training and employment have taken different forms (for example, mentoring, guiding, counselling) and over time have occupied various structural locations (for example, the community, the family, the voluntary sector, medical services, schools, higher education, further education and employing organisations). In England, the origins of careers guidance can be traced back to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when dual-service provision existed for young people in transition from compulsory education into the labour market (Heginbotham, 1951). On the one hand, educationalists were concerned that 'youth' (in those days, this referred to young men) be supported and assisted with their transition into the labour market. On the other hand, there were those aligned to the Ministry for Labour who recognised that the State needed to take some responsibility in assisting school leavers to settle into their niche in the labour market. The first major piece of employment legislation relating to careers guidance post-war was the Employment and Training Act of 1948 (Heginbotham, 1951, p135). This defined the requirement for a national 'Youth Employment Service', controlled by the Ministry for Labour. It acknowledged that young people in transition from compulsory education needed to have help available from information and job placement services. Subsequently, three phases of provision, determined by the legislative context, have been identified (Peck, 2004), each driven by a different philosophy and set of political priorities.

The third of these, the 'focusing agenda' has dominated the landscape since 1998, with careers services for young people required to address the needs of young people who were most at risk in their transition from full time education (OECD, 2003). The Government White Paper 'Learning to Succeed', published in 1999, announced the introduction of Connexions, a new multi-disciplinary service to help all young people reach their full potential and make a successful transition to adult life, which was to include the provision of information, advice and guidance to support young people in making choices, together with a nationally funded programme to improve the provision of IAG for adults about learning and work. The establishment of these two strands of provision would result in the establishment of a national network of what were referred to as 'IAG Partnerships'. Guidelines to support the establishment of partnership working to deliver on these services followed (DfES, CSNU & LSC, 2003), which confirmed that whilst the overall vision was to create two services that worked closely together, they would remain distinct and separate services to serve the need of different age groups, retaining very different resources and infrastructures. At the time of writing, the

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<sup>1</sup> In England, the umbrella term 'Information, Advice and Guidance' (IAG) for the activities of careers guidance was used in the White 'Learning to Succeed' (DfEE, 1999). Subsequently, this terminology has been embedded in various policy documents. IAG is used in The Children's Plan, which states that 'IAG is an umbrella term that covers a range of activities that help young people become more self-reliant and better equipped to manage their own learning and personal career development' (DCSF, 2007, para. 5.16, p112)

implementation of a further fundamental revision to the systems of careers guidance delivery and entitlements for young people is under way, in parallel with the implementation for a new careers service for adults.

Careers education and guidance (CEG) delivered in schools represents a third strand of careers guidance support for young people in England, which is delivered by schools, usually in close partnership with careers practitioners who are external to schools. These practitioners are usually (but not always) a central feature of this schools-based provision (Bimrose et al, 2007a). Various recent publications, like the '14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005a), the White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005b) and 'Youth Matters' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005c), have all identified CEG, or IAG, as an important factor in supporting young people in making successful transitions from education into the labour market. In particular, it plays a role in raising career expectations and aspirations of pupils (Brown et al, 2004) and may also enhance broader school effectiveness (Killeen et al, 1999).

A systematic literature review of recent literature published from 1988 to 2003 focused on the impact of CEG on career transitions from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 (Moon et al, 2004). Overall, the evidence suggests that provision of CEG varies from school to school, depending on a range of factors that can be seen as indicators of quality, including school policy and management, content and organisation of CEG programmes, qualifications of teaching staff designated to deliver CEG, standards of students' work, and library resources. The research implies that these factors affect the transition of young people. Where provision is good, the impact on young people in transition appears to be positive. The review concluded that students have differing CEG needs at each Key Stage and that it was important that CEG should be promoted from Year 7 onwards. Variable standards regarding staff training were noted, together with the lack of suitably qualified teachers. The potential existed for parents' contributions to be more fully utilised and access to careers library resources required improvement. Overall, a coherent strategy across the key stages is lacking.

A second literature review, focusing on a similar period (1988 to 2004), adopted a slightly different emphasis, examining the impact of CEG during Key Stage 4 on young people's transitions into post-16 opportunities (Smith et al, 2005). Findings revealed how the level of young people's career-related skills seems to be an important factor in their transition at 16, with those possessing a high level of skills being less likely to modify choices or switch courses<sup>2</sup>. CEG provision appears to have a positive impact on this. Many findings overlapped with the literature review on Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 provision (Moon et al, 2004). It was concluded that provision of information about post-16 options is patchy and needs to be designed in a way that is relevant and appropriate to its target audience. Additionally, initiatives were found to be more effective when given a long enough timescale and sufficient resources.

Conclusions from a study of young people's perceptions of CEG, not included in the literature reviews cited above, supports the notion that whilst CEG makes many positive contributions, it could achieve much more: 'there is much unfulfilled potential in current careers education and guidance provision and delivery mechanisms to make CEG more attractive and relevant to its young clients' (Stoney et al, 1998, p46). The young people who participated in this particular study greatly valued certain elements of their CEG programmes, but were critical of others. Overall, they were 'anxious to receive careers education and guidance that provided them with information, advice and experience

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<sup>2</sup> Further evidence from research not included in this review supports the findings that learners who receive good quality CEG achieve better and are less likely to drop out of learning or change course after they are 16 (Martinex and Munday, 1998).

which was both individual and specific' (p31). They also wanted differentiated provision (according to individual need) and their CEG to be practical and unbiased (p25).

From various research studies over the past decade, therefore, the case for effective CEG in schools is strong. However, the quality of CEG varies, with differences in how this element of the curriculum is delivered, the status it enjoys in each school, by whom and for how long (Bimrose et al, 2007a). In relation to both strands of careers guidance provision – that delivered by Connexions organisations and the CEG delivered by schools – there is room for improvement. This is noted in the Children's Plan: 'At present the quality of IAG falls short of what young people need.' (DCSF, 2007, para 5.18, p113). The Plan also recognises that individuals need access to services over their lifespan: 'The need for IAG does not change dramatically once someone reaches the age of 19. Good quality IAG needs to be seamless across all age ranges ...' (DCSF, 2007, para 5.22, p113).

These weaknesses are apparent, despite the structures of delivery having been constantly metamorphosed over time. However, the model of careers identity and progression at the centre of these services has remained remarkably consistent. It is this feature of careers provision that represents the biggest challenge in building preferred scenarios for the future.

## **Careers identity and development**

Careers guidance policy in England over the past century has persistently emphasised the importance, and desirability, of matching individuals to the needs of the labour market. This 'matching' approach is based on a model of careers progression which assumes that individuals comprise a set of traits or talents (that is, abilities, aptitudes, achievements, interests and values) that can be measured objectively and 'matched' to occupational environments that coincide with their profiles. It is based on a key belief that where individuals in transition from education are matched successfully with the 'right' jobs, training or further education courses as quickly and effectively as possible, then everyone gains. Individuals, assumed to have a strong work ethic, will derive personal satisfaction from having their abilities effectively harnessed in the workplace. Employers also benefit from productive and efficient employees, who are content because their skills are being appropriately utilised in paid employment. This approach to career progression is driven by a rational model of careers identity and development, where individuals are motivated (and able) to make an accurate and logical assessment of themselves, which is then used to match them to the needs of the labour market to achieve a 'good fit'. Within this paradigm, once individuals have arrived at their 'rational' career decision, they implement the action necessary to achieve their goal. The approach also, importantly, assumes a degree of stability in the labour market, as well as in the abilities and potential of individuals.

The current up-skilling agenda is ensuring a continued focus on this matching model, with its strong emphasis on servicing the needs of the labour market by matching individuals with the correct skills mix to the jobs needing specific profiles. This model, however, was evolved over a hundred years ago in a labour market that was significantly different from the current context. Unsurprisingly, therefore, criticisms of it as a suitable paradigm informing careers guidance policy and practice, both in the present and the future are growing. For example, the very nature of 'career' itself has changed. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) postulate that the concept of career has recently undergone a transformation (p50) and distinguish between career choice as a point-in-time 'event' and a developmental 'process' over a longer period of time (p54). Whilst acknowledging that broader definitions (which include life roles and life span) have emerged, they suggest a more 'parsimonious' definition (p51), limited to vocational behaviour and

vocational development. This is one offered by Arthur et al (1989) who proposed that career is 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time' (p8). Similarly, Young and Collin (2000) consider career to have been a key notion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western societies and identify a range of meanings. These comprise career as: an abstract concept referring to the 'individual's movement through time and space'; as a construct used in academic, professional and lay discourse; as a construct used in organisational and social rhetoric (to motivate and persuade employees); as a construct embracing attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences over a life-span; and as a construct involving self-identity, hopes, dreams, fears and frustrations (p3). 'Overall, career can be seen as an overarching construct that gives meaning to the individual's life' (Young & Collin, 2000, p5).

Other criticisms relate to the failure of the matching model to take sufficient account of context. In particular, its neglect of gender differences in the labour market has been noted (Bimrose, 2002; Bimrose, 2004; Osipow and Fitzgerald, 1996) and its relevance for culturally diverse groups questioned (Leong et al, 1998; Mobley and Slaney, 1998). Yet others focus on socio-economic background, arguing that an emphasis on autonomy and choice may not be relevant for some deprived sectors of society (Brown et al, 1996; Meara et al, 1997). The volatility of many occupational environments, together with the increased pressure on individuals to change and adapt to their circumstances, also compromises the efficacy of a matching approach (Mitchell and Krumboltz, 1996). The matching model was developed in conditions of relatively stable labour market conditions, so assumes a degree of stability. Some implications of the changes that have occurred to the labour market for careers guidance practice will be explored next.

## **Imperatives for change**

Whichever way it is conceptualised, 'career' relates to individual transitions into and around the labour market. 'Career', careers guidance and labour markets are, therefore, very closely aligned. When labour markets change, the concept of career is likely to change and the careers guidance support required is also going to change. To illustrate this point, predictions of labour market change vigorously promoted ten to twenty years ago focused attention on a shift away from an industrial to an information society. These fundamental economic and social changes would demand a high-skill, knowledge-driven labour force, working out of paperless offices either as portfolio workers, or as employees in flatter, less hierarchical organisations. These changes heralded the demise of the traditional, bureaucratic and organisational career in favour of more temporary, fluid career patterns. No longer could individuals look forward to a job for life. In the wake of these types of predictions, new models of career development emerged.

However, this grand vision of labour market change, focusing on overarching trends, has fallen short in a number of respects. In 2000, for example, 96% of workers had one job in the UK, 94.1% of working men and 91.6% of women were in permanent jobs, and of these, 95.2% of men and 73.3% of women worked full-time. Instead of individuals working flexibly, performing tasks for different organisations, there is more multi-tasking within an organisation as individuals switch from one task to another for the same employer:

One job per person has stayed the norm – permanent full-time employment remains dominant, workers are not moving more often from one employer to another and the 'career' – as a way of viewing work – has triumphed.

(Moynagh and Worsley, 2005, p93)

In addition, the proportion of employees seeing themselves as having a career increased from just under half to 60% between 1985 and 2001. The biggest increase (from 14%

to 34%) was amongst low-paid groups, like bus and coach drivers, packers and cleaners. This trend extends to young people, with research evidence revealing how young people also 'appeared firmly wedded to careers'. (Moynagh and Worsley, 2005, p96)

Nor has much progress been made towards creating a high skill, knowledge driven economy. The United States of America, arguably the model for a knowledge driven economy, is not currently showing many signs of developing a labour market where the majority of workers require a high level of skill. What does emerge is an economy where there are

... islands of high skill (geographic clusters, sectors and a few occupations ... set amidst a sea of low skill (and often very poorly paid) service work.  
(Keep and Brown, 2005, p14).

Rather than the development of a high skilled labour force, trends indicate an increasing polarisation, with a growth in high skilled professional and managerial occupations existing in parallel with high demand for labour in lower skilled occupations at the bottom end of the occupational spectrum. An image of an hour-glass economy conveys how this trend towards the polarisation of the workforce is strengthening (Moynagh and Worsley, 2005). This is, of course, not to deny that in some sections of the labour market, the grand vision may have been realised, but there are significant deviations and extensive variations.

In addition to having relevance for the career identity and develop of individuals navigating their way into and through the labour market, career practitioners need to be competent, and confident, to use labour market information (LMI) in their work with clients. The importance of high quality information on labour market information was stressed by the Skills Commission (2008, p36). However, there is a need to identify reliable and objective sources of LMI that practitioners can access, as well as supporting practitioners in its use.

So what might this mean for careers identity and development?

## **New models of career progression, development & identity**

Some of the inadequacies of the dominant 'matching' approach to careers guidance have been identified above. However, there is an emerging consensus regarding the inadequacies of all of the traditional theories that currently inform careers guidance practice, with a common weakness being their tendency to claim universality for their concepts. One other, related problem is the manner in which current theory uses concepts which 'assume cultures that are relatively affluent and have good opportunities for education, upward mobility and family support and encouragement' (Osipow and Littlejohn (1995, p255). So, traditional theories have not provided an adequate explanation of the vocational behaviour – especially those groups suffering labour market disadvantage - because they are based on limited models and definitions of human development, are too psychological and have over-emphasised career roles, neglecting other life roles (Bimrose, 2002; Bimrose, 2008).

In careers guidance practice, Savickas (1993) discusses the general move away from 'logical positivism, objectivist science, and industrialism' towards 'a multiple perspective discourse' (p205), summarising key differences between the modern and post-modern era. These are, first, a rejection of the notion that careers practitioners are experts: 'instead of portraying themselves as masters of truth, counsellors are creating a space where those involved can speak and act for themselves' (p211). Second, is the replacement of the concept of 'fit' with 'enablement' and the affirmation of diversity.

Third, there is the recognition of the importance of context and culture, together with the broadening of focus beyond a pre-occupation with work-role. Together, these signal a move toward life-design counselling and grand narratives (p212). Fourth is a questioning of the legitimacy of separating career from the personal, with a move toward the greater integration of these two domains. Fifth, the realisation that career theory has provided objective guidance techniques which practitioners have increasingly had to combine with subjective techniques derived from counselling theory for their practice. Embryonic career theories are thus being developed which focus more on meaning, invention and construction, and move towards 'co-construction or social construction of meaning' (p213). Finally, there is a shift away from objectifying clients by measurement to a preference for autobiography and meaning-making.

However, the significant and continuing influence of this approach on the practice of careers guidance has been noted by Krumboltz (1994) who suggested that most current practice is 'still governed by the three-part theory outlined by Frank Parsons (1909)' (p14). Savickas (1997) concurred: 'Parsons' paradigm for guiding occupational choice remains to this day the most widely used approach to career counselling' (p150). This is supported by recent findings from a longitudinal study into effective guidance, which indicates that career practitioners in England are still heavily reliant on this approach (Bimrose, et al, 2004; Bimrose and Barnes, 2006). So, in terms of suitable models of career identity and development, the era in which it was assumed that individual behaviour was observable, measurable and linear, and that individual career identity and development could be understood separately from the contexts in which they operate, is now over (Skills Commission, 2008, para 8.1, p20). Two distinct trends in theory development, which sometimes overlap, are emerging. One is towards developing theories that attempt to meet the needs of specific client groups, such as minority ethnic groups or girls and women. The second trend in career theory development is towards those characterised by a post-modern approach. Each operates with a different model of careers development and neither have yet been successfully espoused by the community of guidance practice in the UK (see, for example, Reid, 2008). A key issue, therefore, in any future scenario building for careers guidance is the existing disjuncture between the theory and practice in the UK.

## **Policy for practice?**

The Skills White Paper, which set out the skills strategy, (21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential, DfES, DTI, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003), also contained recommendations for the improvement of IAG services. This was followed by the White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005b), which complemented and extended the earlier White Paper (21st Century Skills: Realising our potential, DfES, Dti, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003). In combination, these publications contain the government's strategy for raising the skill level of the labour force in the UK by ensuring the supply of skills in the labour force matches employer demand. Alongside a high priority given to the efficient functioning of the labour market, the importance of the personal fulfilment that can be derived from the skill development of individuals is emphasised, together with the key role for 'improved' information, advice and guidance (IAG) in supporting individuals to make more effective choices.

In response, the Learning and Skills Council set out their strategy to deliver 'a nationally recognised, high quality and better integrated IAG service for adults' (LSC 2005). Adult services are delivered in diverse settings and in a range of different ways. Contexts in which services are delivered include public employment services, further and higher education, voluntary and community settings, Local Authorities, the private sector, and in other organisations like prisons and health services. These services have been patchy

and their extent has not been systematically mapped, which has implications for future provision (OECD, 2003, p13).

For young people in England, the delivery of IAG services recently has been through Connexions services. Connexions services were launched nationally on a phased basis across England from April 2001. They comprise forty-seven partnerships, which bring together the services that were offered by the former careers services, together with a range of other agencies and are coterminous with local Learning and Skills Council areas. Their purpose was to provide 'a support service for all young people' (Department for Education and Skills, 2000, p4), with the following key aim:

To enable all young people to participate effectively in appropriate learning – whether in school, FE college, training provider or other community setting – by raising their aspirations so that they reach their full potential.

(Department for Education and Skills, 2000, p32)

It has been argued that these and other policy developments relating to service provision in the UK over the past decade exacerbated existing problems, resulting in 'tension and a lack of cohesion' (Mulvey, 2006, p14). Indeed, given the mobility of the labour force, it is something of an anomaly that organisations closely aligned with careers service delivery, like the Sector Skills Councils, Jobcentre Plus and Learndirect, cover the whole of the UK, whilst IAG policy is differentiated by country boundaries (Mulvey, 2006). Within England, there is even further differentiation of IAG services by age, with those for adults delivered quite separately from those for young people. This is in stark contrast to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have all erred towards all-age services. So, whilst in England, 'integrated services based on local labour market information' (HM Treasury, 2006 p.109) appear to be a future aspiration, funding and delivery continue to be separate.

The operation of Connexions partnerships was found to have: 'wide variations in performance between partnerships' (National Audit Office, 2004, p5). Perhaps because of this, radical changes to its structure, operation and delivery were implemented from 1st April, 2008, through the Education and Skills Bill (published 29th November, 2007). The main purpose of this legislation is to provide the legal basis for the raising of the age for leaving education (now defined more broadly as education and training) to 18 from 2015. However, the Bill includes a clause that affected the responsibility for delivering these services from the Secretary of State to local authorities.

The Leitch Review stressed the importance of effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) to the up-skilling agenda for raising aspirations is stressed once again (p106), claiming its equal importance for both young people and adults – since 'too few young people at age 14 are making the link between careers guidance and their personal decisions' (p107). It recommended the establishment of:

... a new universal adult careers service, providing labour market focused careers advice for all adults.

(HM Treasury, 2006, p23)

This new adult careers service will 'give every adult easy access to skills and careers advice that will help them find work and progress in their careers' (p7) and that this new service will 'ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions, and to get the support they need to advance themselves and achieve their full potential' (p10). An important feature of the new service is to be the close integration of services offered by the new 'Adult Advancement and Careers Service', Jobcentre Plus and learndirect.

Despite the current policy context supporting the establishment of high quality, career guidance for both young people and adults, the emphasis, so far, has been on structures for delivery – rather than requiring, and supporting, a shift in practice that accommodates different, and more appropriate, models of career identity and development.

## **The probable and possible**

Policy has lined up a future scenario for careers guidance services in England in which services for young people will continue to be delivered separately from those for adults. For young people's services, IAG partnerships have strategic control over local delivery decisions, with schools determining how each will ensure that 'impartial' careers guidance is available to their students. It seems likely that a diversity of delivery models will emerge at Local Authority level, reflecting local priorities and resources. For adults, the model of delivery for the adult service is under development, with full implementation scheduled for the autumn of 2010. Entitlement by clients to the new service is a key issue. For the past few years, this has been restricted to adults with level 2 qualifications, or below. Whilst it appears that there is a policy aspiration to ensure that careers services are available to all adults who need them, resource constraints are likely to require some type of rationing model. At the centre of the service is a 'skills health check' – which seems destined to operate as a gate-keeping mechanism to other services. How this will operate, and what form it will take, is currently unclear. Irrespective of the exact details of the operational delivery plan, the positioning of this assessment tool at the centre of the delivery of the new service retrenches practice in the philosophical domain of logical positivism. A separate policy mechanism, that has the same type of impact on practice, is the quality assurance methods used to evaluate services. Methods currently in place fail to acknowledge the importance of concepts like 'distance travelled' for clients with multiple difficulties situated in contexts that are problematic for the individual.

One other critical issue which needs resolution before a better future can be realised is workforce development. With the varied policy and delivery priorities, the occupational identity of careers practitioners has been overwhelmed (Bimrose, 2004b). A finding from the OECD cross-country review of guidance is that training has a dominant effect in establishing a professional identity (McCarthy, 2001, p7). Currently, there is inconsistency in the credentials required for the careers guidance workforce and a lack of continuing professional development. A recent OECD review (United Kingdom Country Note, 2003) concludes that whilst the qualifications and training structure for careers guidance is very diverse and highly developed in the UK compared with many other countries (p24), a new, more coherent structure is necessary (p26) that would rationalise the plethora of current qualification routes and provide clear progression paths.

It seems probable, therefore, that whilst careers guidance services both for young people and adults will be delivered through new structures, the practice of career guidance will remain the same – constrained by a model of careers development underpinning practice that is over a hundred years old; with careers guidance separated from services for adults; with CEG continuing to be marginalised in schools; practitioners lacking access to, and training support for key resources (eg LMI); and with training structures that are outmoded and inadequate.

A possible, and preferable, scenario would encompass:

- Models of career development and progression espoused both by policy makers and practitioners that reflect the realities of the labour market and individuals' lives.
- An all-age delivery structure, so that young people making complex labour market transitions are not faced with the complication of navigating a switch to adult services.
- Careers education and guidance (CEG) delivered in schools which did not stand outside the National Curriculum, as it does now.
- CEG that is available to all pupils, through primary and secondary education.
- An entitlement to high quality careers guidance for individuals throughout their lifespan, when needed.
- Services more responsive to need. Evidence from recent longitudinal research on the effectiveness of careers guidance that tracked fifty adults over a five year period illustrates how much adults would appreciate the option of accessing high quality careers guidance, though not all would necessarily take up this offer (Bimrose et al, 2004; Bimrose et al, 2005; Bimrose et al, 2006; Bimrose and Barnes, 2007b). This applies to adults in employment, as well as those trying to re-enter the labour market (from a position of unemployment or from taking a break from employment). The same research identifies the features of career guidance particularly valued by clients – with the benefit of hindsight. Specifically, these are access to specialist information (particularly labour market information), insights, focus, confirmatory and confusion reduction, motivation, increased self-confidence, and positive opportunities for reflection. The particular significance of these findings is that the features of careers guidance most valued by clients relate to the process of the intervention, rather than the outcomes (ie placement into sustainable employment, training or education – the criteria on which careers guidance tends to be judged by funders of services).
- An evaluation culture which would not only provide an evidence base to justify public expenditure, but also to provide feedback that could be used to improve services to clients. To develop this evidence base, a shift is required in at least two directions. Firstly, a commitment by career guidance organisations to engage actively in gathering evidence on the impact of career interventions and to achieve consistency in approach, whilst recognising the differing types and backgrounds of clients served by individual providers. Secondly, the careers profession has to become more committed and proficient in capturing clients' life and career stories by using information, communication technologies (ICT) as a vehicle for systematic data collection, collation and analyses.
- Workforce development activities that were based on the particular theme of building an evidence base, designed to enable practitioners to recognise the limitations of certain approaches as well as the opportunities that can be accrued through more innovative approaches to data collection, client follow-up and reporting mechanisms.
- Careers practice that has labour market information at its centre. This represents one other challenge for workforce development, as the need to build the capacity of the workforce to research, interpret and mediate LMI in work with clients is urgent. The aspect of training has been neglected, with the policy focus on exclusion, so needs to be given an urgent and high priority.
- Use of ICT that is integral to all careers interventions.
- Qualifications for career guidance professionals which are at Masters level. The Children's Plan indicates that teaching will be made a Masters level profession (DCSF, 2007, para 4.3, p83) and careers guidance professionals should also be pegged at this level.

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