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The Future of Professional Career Guidance: Where Next?

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This paper has been prepared as part of igen's 10th anniversary celebrations. Its contents reflect an ongoing dialogue between a Careers Service company chief executive and a career guidance researcher, both of whom are committed to exploring issues related to the future of the career guidance profession. It also includes a detailed bibliography that offers references to relevant reports and journal articles relevant to this topic. Overall, it aims to stimulate and contribute to a national debate on the future of professional career guidance. The authors are indebted to Tony Watts for his editorial support in the preparation of this paper.

igen is a leading supplier of career and personal development services in Yorkshire and the North East of England. Through our subsidiary company Mentra we have established Careergen, an innovative careers solution service, and Triangle Staffing, the UK's leading supplier of professional career guidance staff.

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The Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) is owned by the University of Derby. The Centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities, and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

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1. Introduction

Career guidance can be viewed as having three key elements: (i) supporting informed choices about both work and learning; (ii) helping individuals to manage transitions more effectively; and (iii) helping people to develop the career management skills to manage their own decisions and transitions throughout their working lives, i.e. to develop resilience in the face of constant change. Resilience is something which the career guidance profession has itself had to be very adept at throughout the past 30 years. The value or 'currency' of career guidance is often under-rated, both by policy-makers and by others who have not had active experience of it. Managing learning and work is commonly viewed as a relatively straightforward process, or one that can be left to chance; we must now ask ourselves whether this over-simplification represents a fundamental and deep-rooted source of the under-development and under-utilisation of UK talents and skills.

Recently, Mark Savickas (2006) described the work of Frank Parsons, founder of career guidance in the early 1900s, as being leading-edge during the industrial revolution. He compared the social significance of the industrial revolution to the 21st century digital revolution, with the fast-accelerating explosion of information technology impacting on work and family settings and on the search for work-life balance. We now need a robust model for this new era.

David Peck, a respected senior figure in the career guidance field, has usefully mapped the history of careers services in the UK (Peck, 2004). Here we will argue that the time has arrived for the career guidance profession to renew itself in order for it to become *credible*, *cogent* and *connected* in today's society. In recent years it has tended to be somewhat introspective, focusing on its own activities and processes: examples are the interminable debates on the differences between information, advice and guidance and on degrees of impartiality; the former has been fuelled by Government funding models such as nextstep provision, which has provided funding for information and advice services but not for 'guidance'.

In our consumer-driven society, individuals' expectations are generally more focused on outcomes, added value and benefits for themselves rather than on delivery systems and processes. At present, some services are free and generally available. Others, however, are only available to certain designated priority groups; those outside these groups have to access such services through the private sector or (where relevant) through institution-based embedded provision. Irrespective of arguments relating to entitlement, some would maintain that charged provision is often more highly valued by consumers than free provision, irrespective of the actual quality of delivery.

2. Major developments impacting on the provision of guidance services for young people and adults in England

Over the last decade it has become evident that politicians and their advisers are divided in their assessment of careers work in terms both of its impact and of its social and economic value. Currently there is probably more career-related provision and resource investment in England than ever before. Initiatives such as Connexions, New Deal, nextstep, Train to Gain, the new Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), and embedded services in Further Education and Higher Education, all contribute to a rich mix of provision. However, nearly all this is funded on a short-term basis and focused on a narrow percentage of the population. Across the spectrum of Government policy there is much rhetoric on the vital role that impartial careers and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services have to play in supporting a whole range of agendas including social inclusion, workforce development, vocational curriculum, skills and employment initiatives, rehabilitation of offenders, and economic and community development strategies. There is though a distinct lack of cohesion and consistency of approach to this provision.

The Government is currently undertaking a major review of IAG services for adults involving all the relevant government departments and quangos; however, no comparable review is being undertaken for the provision of career guidance for young people. From 2008 youth support services will, once again, become the statutory responsibility of local authorities, as part of the transition arrangements for Connexions Services, and their budgets will become an integral element of Children and Young People's Services, commissioned through Children's Trusts. There is to be no ring-fenced funding for career guidance provision, and such funding as there is may be used in some cases for direct provision of services by schools and colleges.

A recent special edition of the *British Journal for Guidance and Counselling* focused on the impact of devolution and diversification on career guidance services across the UK. Mulvey (2006) argued that the current structure of career guidance in England, in contrast to the rest of the UK, is 'spun across a fretwork of polarities'. Firstly, there is age polarity, with youth at one end and adults at the other, and little shading along the spectrum in terms of which agency deals with which clients. Secondly, there is the polarity of falling within or outside a designated target group, which is a

major issue as much for adult provision as for youth provision. Thirdly, as a specific instance of this targeting, and as a direct consequence of the Government's social inclusion agenda, there is a polarity between those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (irrespective of age) and those who are in Education, Employment or Training (EET) whose ongoing guidance needs go largely unrecognised and unmet except at certain limited transition points. Fourthly, there is a polarity between policy-makers and professionals: the former having the power and resources to set targets; the latter the responsibility and accountability for their delivery. This of course is not exclusive to career guidance: health, social-care and teaching professionals are subject to similar central determination of both needs and solutions.

For 11-19-year-olds in England, policy-makers seem resigned to tolerate poor career decision-making and course choices, with rising drop-out rates in the late teens and with a majority of resources focused on a minority, rather than proactively allocating resources to help inculcate improved decision-making/career-planning skills for all young people. Weaknesses in career education and guidance in the majority of schools and colleges, as highlighted in the Government's 'end-to-end' review (DfES, 2005) must be rapidly addressed if there is to be any hope of significant improvement in the next decade. They are likely to be further exacerbated in the roll-out of 14-19 vocational diplomas: if early and ongoing career planning support is not available when required, this is likely to lead to discredited programmes which fail to deliver to young people's, parents' or employers' expectations.

Opportunities to improve on the current situation are available to government and its agencies. The impact of the non-statutory curriculum framework for Careers Education and Guidance at Key Stages 3 and 4 in England has yet to be evaluated. The introduction of new national quality standards for the IAG elements of the new integrated youth support services will also provide scope to raise the bar and provide valuable benchmarking.

In terms of the IAG focus of recent work in the UK with adults, the emphasis on career management skills has been downplayed compared with other countries such as Australia and Canada. Here in the UK, Government policies for skills and workforce development tend to be targeted mainly at remedial strategies for the unemployed (or under-employed), low-skilled or disadvantaged groups.

For individuals in work, igen has sought to address this discrepancy by establishing Careergen, a new retail-based service model in Leeds, which is seeking to break new ground by piloting high-value, low-priced career coaching and development services for low to medium earners. In so doing, igen has tried to diminish the boundaries that exist between public- and private-sector careers provision. We consider that the future of high-quality career guidance for the majority, i.e. those in employment, can only be fully achieved by establishing a model which embraces private- and public-funded quality-assured provision.

3. Contemporary issues directly related to the Government's social and economic agendas

We have all become increasing familiar with the Government's use of the terms 'social and economic mobility'. In reality these are not new issues, but rather ones that previously may have been less well articulated. As first-generation aspirants to post-statutory education and with the ability to enter higher education, the authors of this paper had neither the contacts, nor the knowledge, nor any real insight into how to go about making course and career choices. This has made us determined that in our own way we would do whatever we could to ensure that others in a similar situation would have better access to informed support when they required it.

Wendy Hirsh (2006) recently argued that 'the social and economic purposes of career development are inter-dependent'. She pointed out, for example, that 'social inclusion improves equity and quality of life for individuals but also gets people off benefit and improves their mental and physical health', and noted that 'these benefits are economic as well as social'. The current Government's approach to distinguishing those who should have access to free services in terms of their qualification levels (mostly targeted at low qualification levels) has continued to deprive access to other equally 'needy' groups such as new graduates, who increasingly need sustained support in moving into short-term jobs designed to clear student debts.

For the individual, employment flexibility, career management and personal financial management are now all inextricably linked. This is a trend that igen, then known as Leeds Careers Guidance, identified a few years ago. Through national Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) development funding, and subsequent Yorkshire Forward support, it ran a very successful programme over three years providing career development support for underemployed graduates (Ford, 2000). This included an innovative partnership with private-sector recruitment agencies and local universities. Unfortunately, Government priorities changed and graduates fell out of favour.

In many English-speaking countries, careers work is more commonly characterised as 'career development', thus emphasising both its social and economic value and the outcomes and benefits for the client. Also, frameworks and processes seem much stronger elsewhere in tackling employer engagement and in helping governments to develop plans for career development services in partnership with key agencies in education, community and the workplace. For example, in Norway (Norway Country Team, 2006) the education authorities have initiated regional 'Partnerships for Career Guidance' pilot projects, which aim to develop models for binding partnerships for co-ordination and co-operation on career issues within a lifelong perspective.

Clearly the careers guidance profession has still to fully articulate the critical role of its work in helping to achieve Government economic and social goals in a manner that achieves long-term impact. Specifically, we know that our work can and does:

- inspire and encourage individuals to achieve career horizons beyond their immediate experiences;
- make labour markets work more efficiently to deploy, develop and retain skills in the economy;
- contribute to higher productivity (through higher skills and through individuals being better motivated by having a better quality of working life);
- promote lifelong learning needed to motivate, up-skill and re-skill individuals;
- increase participation in learning and work; and
- support social inclusion (bringing more people into the workforce).

In the last decade, the emphasis upon the social-inclusion agenda and targeted services has resulted in the profession drifting away from supporting the labour market as a whole. It is in this context that we need to restate the value of careers work for all individuals. We also need to affirm the benefits for employers, for whom high-quality career development services can:

- help to raise the workforce development aspirations of employees;
- improve the quality of job applications;
- reduce inappropriately targeted applications;
- minimise 'job hopping'; and
- help optimise the use of human resources through self-help activities.

In the UK there has been no lack of new initiatives designed to achieve joined-up partnership working (local LSC IAG Strategy Boards are a recent example). But delivery arrangements still appear fragmented, particularly from a consumer perspective. This situation is compounded by the short-term funding of public career guidance contracts. Currently igen has no contract for longer than one year. This clearly inhibits ongoing investment and deployment of resources and leads to insecurity of tenure for employees. The disparate delivery models adopted across Connexions Services in England have not helped the situation. In fact, the only time in recent years when there has been real stability in the career guidance field was between 1974 and 1993, when across the UK there was a consistent delivery model for professional Careers Services through local authorities (prior to 1974 there had been a dual delivery model, involving services being run in some areas by local authorities and in others by the then Department for Employment).

Interestingly, with the imminent demise of Connexions Partnerships, career guidance may once again be in the ascendancy. Several Connexions companies are already looking to reposition themselves as career guidance organisations. Also, in the adult guidance market, it has not gone unnoticed that the latest multi-million pound marketing initiative by learndirect refers to their helpline and email facilities as being the place to go for 'career guidance'. It would seem that the once taboo 'c' word is now coming out of the closet!

It should not be assumed, however, that new delivery models over the next few years will reflect those that currently exist. In the UK the career guidance profession has always been intrinsically linked with its employing organisations, with heavy reliance on the employer for ongoing continuous professional development (CPD) support. This reliance on the employer has discouraged individual professionals from taking responsibility for their own CPD or proactively engaging with others through professional associations. There are of course parallels in the UK to other industry sectors where there has in the past been significant reliance on large employers to undertake the majority of workforce training.

In the career guidance profession, however, this is an unusual model in comparison to most other countries where the workforce is either employed by individual educational institutions or where career professionals are a small part of much larger regional/state or national government agencies. In countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA, the lack of dedicated employer infrastructure support has necessitated greater networking, and reliance on professional associations

for CPD, resulting in development of national recognised qualifications through the earning of credits for attendance and completion of professional courses. This model is prevalent in many other professions within the UK. Future arrangements for careers services both for young people and for adults are rapidly moving to a more disparate delivery model. As a result, it is crucial that there should be a strong national CPD and support framework in order for the profession to continue to retain its distinct identity.

4. Future shape and characteristics of effective career guidance services

As we have indicated, the term 'career guidance' has never been fully understood by the general public, which largely views it as being about advice on and getting into a job with prospects. Therefore, a new and dynamic vision has to be articulated in order to stimulate new investments by policy-makers and other key stakeholders. We argue that what is needed is an enhancement of underpinning core values, competencies and performance indicators linked to social and economic objectives, that will ensure consistency and continuity in provision. One possibility is to adopt the approach of countries such as Canada and Australia which have embraced the notion of career and have embodied it within a 'blueprint for career development' (Jarvis, 2000). The blueprint approach makes explicit the competencies that all citizens need to develop in order to manage effectively their life, learning and work balance. It also provides a schema for the development, implementation and evaluation of career interventions designed to help individuals achieve core competencies.

So far, policy-makers in England appear unreceptive to the idea of a national blueprint, possibly because the career guidance profession has failed to make the link between its work and the Government's social and economic objectives. Furthermore, the efforts that some professional associations have made to demonstrate this link have been hampered by the proliferation of relatively small associations with sometimes competing agendas. The Australians and Canadians have overcome this and have not allowed such organisational complexities, including those associated with state and provincial boundaries, to distract them from this goal. These countries are convinced of the benefit of the blueprint approach in:

- helping people to continuously adapt to change and manage their careers;
- facilitating and supporting the quality and consistency of services;
- optimising the development and efficient use of resources targeted upon the achievement of competencies;
- supporting the integrity of services by maintaining the focus on individuals' career development, whilst at the same time supporting Government social and economic objectives; and
- evaluating and reporting on the impact of specific interventions to inform future investments.

In addition to providing national consistency, the blueprint framework facilitates the recognition of differing cultural beliefs and values in supporting the achievement of individuals' goals. We can learn lessons here from our colleagues in New Zealand (New Zealand Country Team, 2006), where the Career Service offers a customised approach for Maori and Pacific peoples by delivering career guidance within a framework that reflects their cultural beliefs and values. This type of practice could easily be transferred to inform and support local services working with black and other minority ethnic groups.

If we adopt this type of blueprint approach, it could embrace both public- and private-sector provision; indeed, one could argue that it will help to support the harmonisation of what might otherwise be viewed as conflicting services. It could also help to provide clearer 'product definition' and offer a solution to government policy-makers by encouraging individuals to accept responsibility for their own career development and sustained financial independence. In addition, it would enable the Government to promote actively the role of career development services in both the private and public sectors. Linked to this is the potential for developing common ethical standards and codes of practice, as well as industry standards for employing organisations. By providing the basis for such a framework, the blueprint could help to address concerns about unregulated private and embedded provision which do not always act in the interest of the consumer.

In 2005, the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) at the University of Derby examined the potential application of market principles to the delivery of career guidance in the UK (Watts, Hughes & Wood, 2005). We participated in this event and supported its main conclusions, which were:

(i) Public policy in the UK has remained ambivalent about 'market-based provision' in careers work.

(ii) In the absence of support for comprehensive and universal publicly-funded provision, a new design framework is required. The IAG review of adult

information and guidance in England is currently examining this issue.

(iii) Evidence from learndirect and elsewhere suggests that there is latent demand for career development services, which could be stimulated by effective marketing. The newly launched learndirect telephone guidance pilot is testing out this proposition: we await the results from this work.

(iv) Public/private-sector partnership arrangements are required to secure confident signposting and appropriate referrals. An important and as-yet-unresolved issue is whether the role of Government is to pump-prime a market which could then become self-sustaining and/or whether Government should have a continuing marketing and referral role (as a market-maker) embracing all accredited providers of services, irrespective of how they are funded or services are purchased.

(v) In order to meet the potential demands of consumers within and outside the education and labour markets, there is an urgent need to drive up the capacity of the career development industry. This might include:

- Mapping in more detail the existing capacity of the private sector and in-house provision by employers/trade unions (we currently have limited information on this).
- Reviewing the training, financial support and supervision available to entrants to the industry.
- Specifying requirements for CPD and offering appropriate training routes, both accredited and non-accredited.

5. The new professional career development worker

The time is right for a fresh look at our profession, what we are trying to achieve and the necessary supporting framework and strategies. What we are talking about is, in a sense, the notion of a new professional career development worker.

What are the issues linked to such a role? They include the need for practitioners, managers and trainers to:

- focus less as a profession on internal processes and activities and avoid endless debates on the differences between the I (information), the A (advice) and the G (guidance);
- recognise and support the central role that educational institutions need to play in the career preparation of their learners;
- be prepared to invest in their own ongoing CPD needs in partnership with their employers;
- focus more on the outcomes and benefits of the service for potential consumers;
- embrace a single national framework to support the career development of individuals;
- connect more fully with work, employment and labour market trends at national, regional and local levels;
- recognise the role of private provision in delivering, in tandem with public provision, a comprehensive career development service for all individuals;
- engage more fully with employers to emphasise the advantages to them, and minimise the perceived disadvantages, of workforce career development;
- embrace the inevitability that the Government will always require evidence of the effectiveness and impact of services in delivering their social and economic objectives, and accept responsibility for influencing and contributing to this process; and
- develop high-profile role models to bring renewed respect and value to the profession.

Let's look at some of these points in more detail. Neither funding bodies or consumers of the service are interested in differentiating between information, advice and guidance within the context of career support. For too long the profession has debated the semantics of the differences inherent in these descriptors. Similarly, great play has been made on impartiality that, it has been argued, can only come from independent external organisations not involved in provision of learning, training and employment. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are still issues around the appropriateness of advice given by institutions that are 11-18 providers, we have to recognise that the agenda has changed and that for the majority of young people the transition at 16 is no longer relevant, with successive Government policies clearly focused on young adults remaining in some form of learning provision until at least 19 years of age.

Unfortunately, far too much professional adviser time is still taken up with providing the 'I' and the 'A' elements for individual clients, in spite of the explosion of media now available for individuals to access career-related information and advice for themselves. Clearly there is a strong role here to be played by educational

institutions in providing facilitated access to sources of information and advice, from a variety of professionals as well as from online sources. There is a need for professional career development support to become more embedded within institutions, allied to demanding quality standards which are externally verified, together with high-quality local, regional and national career and labour market information which is up-to-date and easily accessible.

This model will require strong ongoing support for initial and ongoing training and development of the careers workers, including those from the teaching profession. As a workforce we also need to achieve professional stretch by encouraging greater specialisation and high levels of expertise at both ends of the professional spectrum. The recent trend has been to collapse the profession, with a blurring of roles between advisers at different qualification levels, leading to an overall dumbing down. To be considered a true profession, there is a need to be able to engage with all levels of client requirement. We must develop a professional framework that provides for greater range of skills and knowledge than is currently available through our training courses.

So far, we have condensed the training downwards, towards basic training for any individual or group. Our proposition, by contrast, is to build upwards from a certificate level through to Master's and PhD level so that a scholarly and practice-oriented approach is reinstated, to improve credibility and coherence. An example of this is Hiebert's (1995) work in Canada, showcasing a collection of strategies and resources that highlight innovation in Canadian career development policies and practices. There are 48 separate digests, each of which targets a specific aspect of career development and career counselling in Canada. It is a resource for acquiring knowledge of best practices and professional developments in the field.

Current workforce reforms and specific service requirements do not make allowance for this approach. Introduction of the new Learning, Development and Support Services (LDSS) qualification seems set to further water down professional standards, with the inclusion of career professionals within what is essentially a social-care sector. More than ever, there is a need for career professionals in all sectors to work together to develop a professional framework. The supply of professional advisers is in considerable danger of drying up if current plans for young people's services, and probably for adult services as well, continue down their projected routes.

There is an urgent need in particular for a national CPD framework across England, and perhaps across the UK as a whole. The universities and the private sector need to lend their weight and expertise to addressing this issue, possibly learning from other adjacent sectors such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), in conjunction with the existing range of professional careers bodies. Together we need to sell a practical vision to Government and key employing bodies, which move away from prescribing models of funding (e.g. the numbers of advisers in training at prescribed NVQ levels) to a vision which recognises and respects the differing benchmark levels of professional expertise and qualifications that are required, linked to a rigorous and assessed CPD development framework. With this in place, it will be possible to have a broad church of colleagues working within different roles and sectors, providing a strong and coherent platform to respond to individual and Government requirements for support for future generations.

This approach must be designed to meet differing audiences such as Connexions, nextstep, FE/HE Careers Services and private agencies. The uncertainty surrounding the future direction of careers work has contributed to anomalies in the system (Mulvey & Holden, 2005) as well as to a high degree of volatility throughout the guidance sector; this in turn has led to a rather muddled and fragmented training landscape. Whilst attempts to achieve stability and continuity have been supported by nationally-moderated elements designed to clarify and set minimum standards, we have experienced both 'push' and 'pull' factors influencing the content and design of careers training. On the one hand, employers demand a strong input to programme content, design and delivery, so that their business needs (as prescribed by Government contracts) can be fully met; on the other hand, prescribed professional quality standards for training, linked to specified learning outcomes, place additional requirements that sometimes conflict with the perceived needs of businesses. Careers Scotland offers a good example of this, actively seeking to create a new qualification to replace more traditional approaches adopted by local universities.

In England, we need to consider more fully the differing extents to which training in career development support is being built into other allied professions. Professional training links need to be forged with human resource development (HRD) experts. In South Africa, the constitutional framework advocates 'the need for effective career management in the Public Service by referring to the cultivation of good human resource management and career development practices as one of the basic values and principles governing public administration' (Malan, 2006, p.145). Whilst this has yet to be fully achieved, it

illustrates the potential role of human resource departments as key providers of career development services. Interestingly, weak links currently exist between CIPD and the careers professional associations. The challenge for these associations is how best to achieve membership structures that represent the full range of career development services and those operating within this broad church of activity.

6. Where next?

In summary, our central message is that just as Parsons's work arose out of the requirements of the industrial revolution, so now as a profession we need to seize the initiative and address the social and economic needs of the new century. As we have argued, the main reason we have lost impetus is that we have failed to be innovative and fresh in our approach. The profession needs to agree a common framework (a blueprint) that galvanises our collective efforts to deliver high-quality services for the benefit of potential consumers, focused on the concept of 'career' and 'career development'. We need to design, develop and deliver training and professional development programmes to support the role of the new professional career development worker. Crucially, we also need to join-up our relatively small-sized professional associations to present a more concentrated and coherent message to policy-makers and employers.

Politicians and civil servants in the UK have yet to realise the full value of using career development to unlock individuals' potential. The career guidance community has failed to impress upon government the inextricable inter-connectivity between a variety of self-management skills, including those of career development, entrepreneurship, personal financial management and social responsibility. [1]

Policy is not fixed in stone; it needs to be adjusted to ensure relevance and efficacy. It is time to rebuild, reframe and re-energise!

[1] In 1999, the late Linda Ammon CBE conveyed this sentiment in delivering the first CeGS Public Lecture.

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