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UNDERSTANDING PARENTS' CONTRIBUTION TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAREER DECISION-MAKING



LEWIS CLARK AND NICKI MOORE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE STUDIES DISCUSS THE RESULTS OF PAN-EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENCES ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAREER DECISION-MAKING

From 2018 to 2020 a team of researchers at the International Centre for Guidance Studies (ICeGS) led a European funded research project in partnership with colleagues from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece and Spain. We wanted to try and understand what the key influences are on young people's career decision making as they often have complex social networks that significantly influence the decisions they make.

Each partner gathered data from young people aged 13 to 16 and from a separate group of parents and carers who had a child aged 13 to 16. In total, 487 young people and 285 parents/carers were involved.

The findings demonstrated the significant role parents and carers play in their child's career decision making. We were interested in this finding as it reinforces previous research that emphasises the need for parents/carers to be supported so they can provide informed careers advice for their child (Barnes, Bimrose, Brown, Gough & Wright, 2020). The importance of parental involvement is also highlighted throughout UK career guidance policy such as the Gatsby Benchmarks (The Gatsby Charitable Organisation, 2014) in England, the careers strategy in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2020) and careers strategic vision in Wales (Careers Wales, 2017). This article introduces some of the interesting data that emerged about parental involvement before discussing how the findings informed the development of a parental engagement framework.

Results from the survey and focus groups

We found that young people viewed parents/carers as the most common source of information to help with their decisions about learning and work when compared to other sources of information such as the internet, friends, booklets, workplaces and teachers, among others.

Young people also viewed parents/carers as having the most influence on their career decision making when compared to a range of other people including siblings, people in the community, careers advisers and teachers, among others. Discussions with young people in England highlighted the pros and cons of this parental influence. Some young people mentioned how their parents/carers are supportive and encourage them to pursue a career that they are passionate about while others mentioned how their parents/carers often put pressure on them to

pursue a particular career which can prevent them from making autonomous career decisions.

Many parents/carers recognised the role they play in supporting their child to make career decisions. In England, Denmark and Spain over 85% of responding parents/carers felt they had a responsibility to support their child with their career decision making. This was slightly lower for responding parents/carers in Greece (75%) and Czech Republic (65%). When parents/carers were asked whether they were actively seeking careers information to support their child, we found over three quarters of responding parents/carers from the UK (88%), Spain (82%), Czech Republic (81%) and Greece (75%) were actively seeking careers information, but this was lower for parents/carers in Denmark (54%). Of those who were actively seeking careers information, the internet was the most common approach used to source this information.

A new research approach: Research circles

ICeGS researchers used the data as a focus for three research circles. Research circles are a methodological approach developed in Sweden designed to bring researchers and practitioners together to share and explore their own experiences. Each participant is valued equally and asked to use their different perspectives and experience to explore a certain question or issue together. We brought four ICGS researchers, three careers leaders and one enterprise co-ordinator together to discuss to role of parents/carers in their child's career decision making.

The group had an in-depth discussion about how to help parents/carers develop the knowledge and skills needed to support their child with their career decision making. Points were raised specifically around the challenges that prevent parents/carers developing their knowledge such as lack of accessible information. This can be an issue because parents have no access to technology or documents are not in a format which makes them accessible. In some cases, it was a lack of experience with further/higher education and/or work and lacking in confidence to have meaningful conversations with their child about careers.

The members of the research circle noted that most of the school-based activities involving parents are largely passive information provision which do not encourage curiosity and commitment. They concluded that it



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was necessary to find new ways to engage parents. One participant shared an example from their practice which showed that when parents participated in an education fair, the young people rated the career learning activity twice as highly as young people who did not have the parents with them. This example contributed to discussions and ideas on how to pilot activities to investigate how to strengthen parental engagement in various career learning activities.

Collectively, the findings highlight the significant role parents/carers play in their child's career decision making. However, many parents/carers need support to help develop their knowledge and skills so they can inform and communicate with their child effectively. Much of the existing guidance to schools focuses on the need to provide good quality and timely careers information but provides little information about what parents need to know, be able to do, or what mind sets are required. The members of the research circle began to ask the question what competencies parents need and how can they be encouraged to develop these. This was the focus of the main outcome from their work and the team produced a draft framework of outcomes to support schools and colleges to improve their parental engagement activities.

These findings led to the development of a parental engagement framework. The framework sets out the competences required by parents if they are going to fully support their child's career development and is differentiated by key stage. The framework will be a useful tool in helping schools to develop their provision. The framework can be accessed in the report on the project.

References

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