

Editorial

The aim of this issue is to 'showcase' the work of a number of writers who are engaged with research at post-graduate level, beyond any initial professional education. As will become evident some of this work is completed, or near to completion, whilst other work is at the start of the research process. All of the writers are experienced practitioners and/or academics who have sought to expand their knowledge in an area of professional interest and to disseminate this to others. The research presented in this issue also represents different sectors within career education and guidance.

In the first article Liz Bradley reports on the early stages of her research and provides an example of reflexive research into the impact of 'whiteness' and unexplored attitudes towards clients who present with a different world view. The article suggests the need for practitioners to engage in deeper reflection of these issues to develop culturally attuned practice. Liz uses narrative excerpts in her work to illustrate and explain the impact of her experience and the development of her thinking. The struggle to make sense of the experience and to understand the context of the client is shown in the narrative and reflections on the narrative. This format, dealing with illuminative particularities, can help us to understand macro issues on a micro scale. A focus on context and the power imbalance in such exchanges acted as the impetus and desire to name a problem and research it further. A problem in practice that worries us, at the same time as inspiring interest, is a good place to start with a postgraduate research study.

Writing about the career aspirations of older professional workers, Ian King also takes a narrative and auto/biographical approach. Ian writes, 'In contemporary society the concept of retirement is being challenged as the population ages and the government reviews their social strategies'. The article not only pays attention to this often neglected sector, but also illustrates some of the main issues that face a researcher working at doctoral level. The third study also describes work at doctoral level and investigates whether the pathway planning process for children leaving care could improve the life chances of female care leavers who are teenage parents. Michelle Stewart states, 'Central to the process are the young person's aspirations and sense of identity, both fundamental to career planning.'

The next two articles are from colleagues undertaking doctoral research in New Zealand. Taking a critical and reflexive approach, Barrie Irving writes about how the researcher needs to position themselves in their research. In his study he is exploring 'whether career education policy and practice is socially inclusive, culturally sensitive, critically informed and politically dynamic'. The work aims to provide a framework for career education in New Zealand; in order to offer a critical understanding of 'good practice' that can incorporate social justice. Also researching a subject that can have implications for services in other countries, Fiona Douglas is examining how career practitioners' views of their professional identity are affected by their environment. Like the previous writers, Fiona is interested in how her research participants construct meaning in their lives within particular contexts. Professional identity is a topic that will be of interest to many practitioners in the UK and elsewhere.

Returning to the UK, Douglas Govan reports on a study that is exploring the helping skills used by career advisers in Scotland. Douglas is interested in the 'active ingredients' of interviews, seeking to understand the advisers' inputs and the use of particular skills. In the article we are presented with a particular system that is used to investigate and categorise those skills. In the discussion section of the article, Douglas states that many advisers are not aware of the skills they use and he writes: 'The data captured in this study has for some stimulated a deep reflection on practice that helps to bring to life the impact of theory on their work with clients'.

Finally, Christopoulos *et al.* report on a study evaluating a Postgraduate Certificate in Telephone Guidance. The paper is written by five Quality Coaches who gained the certificate and a tutor from the University of Derby. The Quality Coaches work for the Careers Advice Service (previously Ufi/learnDirect). The article reports on activities that work toward quality assurance for telephone guidance: these include reflective practice, mentoring, skills/cluster groups and the production of an electronic portfolio. Each is outlined within the development of the work. This final article demonstrates how postgraduate study has helped to support the development of the practitioners' skills and has enriched their reflective practice. Indeed, reflexivity is a theme that unites all of these examples of postgraduate study and writing.

Hazel Reid
Guest Editor