

Towards a new professional status?

Challenges and opportunities for the careers profession

This issue takes forward the debate held at the NICEC National Network Meeting in March 2011. The meeting discussed the issues addressed by the report *Towards a Strong Careers Profession* and situated these within a broader understanding of the nature of professions and the challenges faced. The journal extends that debate and reflects on the implications for the future of the career guidance profession in challenging times. Innovative thinking and practice is required at this turning point for the careers profession: you'll find that thinking in this issue.

Rachel Mulvey gives an account of the Careers Profession Task Force, from her perspective as its Vice Chair, considering its mission, methods, processes and challenges. All fourteen of the formal recommendations are presented. The article concludes that with the work of the taskforce now completed, the challenge for career professionals gathers apace.

Julia Evetts states that the sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers. After clarifying the three concepts of profession, professionalization and professionalism, she continues with a section on professionalism, its history and current developments. The second section considers the main challenges to, and the third section the opportunities for, professionalism as an occupational value for the sector.

Bill Law considers that careers work professionalism is a personal commitment framed by an institutional policy. He argues that without the institutional, the commitment is unsupported; without the commitment, the policy is futile. The meanings attributed to careers-work professionalism are all contestable and Bill probes those dissonances, examining the issues they raise for our credibility, expertise, connectedness and independence. He concludes that their resolution has consequences for the public face of careers work in all its aspects.

John Gough reflects on what may now constitute the occupational and professional identity of career guidance practitioners after a decade of rapid change, and in the face of further significant policy developments. Building on recent research, he considers the effects of policy shifts, and their attendant managerialism, on the identity of careers practitioners in a wide variety of organisational settings. He uses a particular model to illuminate and critically examine the structural, political, motivational and symbolic aspects of change, including identity reformation.

Tony Watts reviews the international evidence in relation to four aspects of the emerging policy model for career guidance in England: an all-age service; revitalising the professionalism of career guidance; the partnership

model between schools and an external service; and the introduction of school commissioning. Evidence is also reviewed in relation to six high-performing countries in terms of school performance. He concludes that there is no common pattern that characterises the career guidance provision in these countries, but that any devolution of responsibility to schools needs to be accompanied by strong policy levers.

Siobhan Neary's research examines how professional identity is defined within career guidance in England in the wake of ongoing change. She considers the components and the factors that contribute to the formation of professional identity, and the relationship with postgraduate continuing professional development (CPD). The study draws on the perceptions of a group of England-based practitioners broadly representing the sector, but bounded by one common factor; they have all undertaken a postgraduate qualification focusing on CPD within a guidance related discipline.

Samantha Cregeen-Cook reports on research that explores 360° feedback on the use of 'visual tools' for career guidance practice. Developed through data obtained during interviews with guidance practitioners, young people and their drawings – innovative thinking for practice is promoted at this 'crossroads' moment for the careers profession. The data produced demonstrates the interpretative nature of the research and the individual meanings constructed from it. Samantha argues that as we move towards a National Careers Service for England, resourceful and inventive practice is crucial for future development.

Laurie Simpson suggests that today's careers practitioners are tasked with offering assistance to a populace becoming increasingly culturally diverse, whilst facing ever growing professional insecurity. There is a need, she argues, to develop creative practice to meet the needs of individuals but also to motivate practitioners. Laurie considers creative written practices referring to case studies from her autoethnographic research: offering both a reflective and reflexive account. Her intention is to encourage career professionals to consider possible creative writing processes to facilitate clients to tell their unique stories, but also as a way to observe their own career journey; enhancing their understanding of the changing nature of career.

My thanks go to all the authors for their thought-provoking contributions.

Hazel Reid, Co-editor
