Career guidance in England today: reform, accidental injury or attempted murder?

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(Received 18 November 2012; final version received 21 January 2013)

In 2011 England's career guidance profession lost its 'own' public service organisation and its former dedicated stream of public funding. The immediate causes lay in decisions by the government of the day, but this article revisits the profession's history to seek explanations for its later vulnerability. It is argued that decisions taken early in the profession's history, specifically its complete separation from adult employment services and basing claims to professional expertise almost wholly on occupational psychology, though maybe right at the time, were to have fateful consequences. The article proceeds to argue that career guidance will certainly survive its recent trauma, but the most likely outcome of the current 'reforms' – a market in career guidance services – will not create the kind of comprehensive education-to-work bridging service that was once intended and which is still needed.

Keywords: career guidance; careers service; Institute of Career Guidance; Juvenile Employment Service; labour exchanges; occupational psychology; Youth Employment Service

Introduction

At the start of the twenty-first century Britain's career guidance profession was facing a healthy future. International comparisons had consistently credited the UK with having one of the world's best career guidance services (see, for example, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2003; Reubens, 1977; T. Watts, 1988, 2002). Demand could only grow as young people's education-to-work transitions lengthened and became more complex, thus creating demand for guidance at successive career junctures. It flew in the face of all historical indicators when, in 2011, there were alarm calls among career guidance professionals followed by redundancy notices and a declining membership in their professional body, the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG). The following passages seek to understand how this current situation has arisen – not the immediate causes, which are easily identified (see Hooley & Watts, 2011), but clues from the longer history of the service.

The current situation referred to above is the situation in England. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have developed or will develop their careers services for young people into all-age guidance services. This has been an aspiration of the UK-wide guidance profession since the 1970s. It is being fulfilled in most countries

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of the UK but England, forever perfidious Albion, is forging its own path. The analysis focuses on career guidance for young people. They are the only age group in Britain for whom public career guidance services have a continuous and now century-long history. There have been many start-ups, pilot projects and precursors which have offered guidance to adults (see Irving & Slater, 2002; Watts & Dent, 2008). In 2012, a new National Careers Service (NCS) was launched, incorporating the existing Learndirect and NextStep. The NCS may build a long and distinguished track record, but this will be available for examination only in the future.

History is always made (up) in the present. We constantly re-interpret the past in successive efforts to better understand a forever changing present. In the past we can always find causes that have contributed to later developments. However, there are further current grounds for career guidance in Britain to revisit its history. In 2013 the ICG is merging with three cognate associations into a new Career Development Institute (CDI) which, it is hoped, will provide the profession with a unified and therefore stronger and more influential voice. The ICG's partners are the Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG) whose members are mostly school and college-based, the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA) and the Association of Career Professionals International (ACPI). The ICG is the bearer of a special historical vision and mission which may be forever lost, but may alternatively be re-invigorated from within the new mix. A fresh look at history can offer both clues to the present and aspirations for the future.

History

1910–1973: the formation of a career guidance profession

Beginnings

Histories of career guidance in Britain invariably begin with the Education (Choice of Employment) Act of 1910 (see Heginbotham, 1951; Peck, 2004; Roberts, 1971). This legislation was introduced alongside the Labour Exchanges Act which was passed in 1909. The relevant services had been pioneered in the voluntary sector in various parts of Britain from the 1880s onwards. As in many branches of what became known as the 'welfare state', the founders were philanthropists and volunteers whose initiatives were taken over by the state and made available nationwide. The case for public employment exchanges, free at the point of use for both workers and employers, was that the exchanges would reduce unemployment and achieve the best possible match between jobs and workers by enabling all firms seeking labour and all individuals seeking work to access the full range of what was on offer. The passage of two separate Acts of Parliament shows that, right from the start, it was recognised that school-leavers and other juveniles would require a rather different service to job-seeking adults. Thirteen was the typical school-leaving age throughout Britain at that time. These beginning workers were regarded as needing advice not just to reduce their risks of becoming unemployed, but also to steer them clear of physically and morally hazardous employment and dead-end jobs (errand boy, tea girl and suchlike) from which there was no prospect of progress to adult earnings. It was agreed prior to the passage of the legislation that the task of advising juveniles should go not to staff of the adult labour exchanges that would be operated by the Board of Trade, and subsequently by the hived-off Ministry of Labour, but by the local education authorities (LEAs) that had been created by the 1902 Education

Act. Thus the LEAs created Juvenile Employment Services, staffed by juvenile employment officers, the predecessors of present-day career guidance professionals.

There was uncertainty and indecision to begin with about the best division of labour between the LEA service and the adult labour exchanges. The normal initial arrangement was that LEA staff would offer advice to school-leavers, then refer those who needed assistance in obtaining employment to juvenile sections at the labour exchanges. However, it was soon realised by all parties that this arrangement was not working well, largely because jobs recommended by labour exchange staff did not always follow the advice offered by the LEA officers. Hence the decision following the First World War that one party or the other should deliver the entire service, and it was also agreed that the preferred provider was the LEA. LEAs were encouraged to offer a full Juvenile Employment Service which combined advice and a juvenile employment exchange for those who needed the latter. When LEAs declined to assume responsibility, the full service was offered by juvenile sections in the adult labour exchanges. Over time, more and more LEAs became the service providers, and in 1973 it became mandatory for LEAs to operate the Careers Service, the third title of the original Juvenile Employment Service which had become the Youth Employment Service in 1948. The 1948 retitling simply reflected changes in the way the age group was referred to in the wider society. The switch to Careers Service in 1973 reflected changes in how the service's staff regarded their work.

Workloads

When studying the (then) Youth Employment Service in the 1960s (Roberts, 1971) it was possible to interview senior staff who had started their own careers in the Juvenile Employment Service before the Second World War. At that time there was no occupation-specific qualification or training. Staff learnt on the job. The work was considered suitable for local government staff who were 'good with' or 'interested in' young people, maybe demonstrated by their involvement in voluntary youth work. The advice offered to juveniles was based on personal experience and the era's common sense. Local government staff could gain qualifications in public administration, but most of the departments (parks, baths, cemeteries, libraries and so on) were, at best, in the early stages of professionalisation. The standard service offered to school-leavers had been fixed in the initial years of the Juvenile Employment Service. Its staff would visit local schools to deliver 'pep talks' to pupils in the final year. These were followed by a 'conference', later more appropriately called an interview, at which a parent and teacher might be present in addition to the juvenile employment officer and the school-leaver. The aim of these interviews was to agree on a suitable occupation, then to direct the pupil to the placement service if this help was needed. 'The' talk and interview remained the basic service during the 1950s when school-to-work researchers began to condemn the menu as 'too little and too late' (see Carter, 1962; Veness, 1962). Very few youth employment officers dissented from this judgement.

Advice and placement were not the only responsibilities of the Juvenile Employment Service and subsequently the Youth Employment Service. One officer who had joined the service in the 1930s explained that until the Second World War his own main job had been to issue National Insurance cards to school-leavers. The 1909 and 1910 Labour Exchanges Act and Education Act were part of the broader package of social reforms introduced by the Liberal governments of

Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith between 1906 and the First World War. Old age pensions were introduced in 1909. At the time these were financed from general taxation. Then in 1911 Britain's first National Insurance Act was passed. This provided for the payment of sickness and unemployment benefits. These were to be disbursed from a (notionally) separate national insurance fund into which employers and workers made weekly contributions. The insurance principle was supposed to make the additional taxation acceptable to the payers, and the pay-outs acceptable to the wider population since the recipients would have paid for their benefits. Any government that offers unemployment benefits needs to be able to ensure that claimants are really unemployed and seeking work. In other words, it needs labour exchanges. Reducing unemployment may have been the main motive of labour exchanges' advocates, but the government's need to act on the proposal was also a response to its intention to create unemployment and sickness benefits as poverty alleviation measures. From 1911 onwards a task of the Juvenile Employment Service was to issue National Insurance cards to all school-leavers, and the service would also process claims and enter periods of registered unemployment in the National Insurance records. National Insurance cards on which weekly stamps were pasted continued to be used until after the Second World War, but even when the system became electronic the Youth Employment Service continued to register school-leavers who were entering their first employment. The Careers Service lost this role in the mid-1970s, and youth employment researchers (like myself) lost their time series on types of first employment entered by school-leavers. These data were replaced in the early 1980s by the ongoing Youth Cohort Surveys.

Professionalisation

The work of juvenile employment officers was higher-grade clerical in local government staffing terms. The only promotion was into management positions, of which there were few since a typical local Juvenile Employment Service would employ no more than a few dozen staff. The indications are that the service's staff experienced status deprivation when confronting better-qualified elementary school teachers, and this disparity would be even more acute when confronting secondary (grammar) school teachers who were university graduates. This is the background to the attempts to professionalise the occupation which began in the early 1920s with the formation of a National Association of Juvenile Employment and Welfare Officers. In time the welfare officers (known to the wider public as truancy officers) separated and the 'national association' became the more professional sounding 'institute', first of youth employment officers, subsequently careers officers, then career guidance.

The pre-1939 national association needed a professional knowledge base for its members' work, and the base selected was occupational psychology. This was in the era when psychologists were developing tests that differentiated individuals' abilities. The most famous of these tests measured general intelligence (IQ), but tests were also being constructed that measured occupational abilities, aptitudes and interests. Juvenile employment officers believed that by developing expertise in the administration and interpretation of these tests, their advice and guidance could be given a scientific basis. From 1935 onwards the national association worked on plans to develop a course and qualification in vocational guidance (which was to be awarded by the University of London) but the Second World War intervened, and the first

courses did not commence until 1949. The qualification, initially called the Diploma in Vocational Guidance (DVG), was validated jointly by the Institute of Youth Employment Officers and the Local Government Training Board, but always awarded by a local higher education institution. During the 1950s this qualification became a requirement for employment in the Youth Employment Service's professional grades. Before and immediately after the Second World War the most influential occupational psychologist in the career guidance field was Alec Rodger who had a seven-point plan (see Rodger, 1974). Occupations were graded in terms of their need for seven kinds of capability. Young and older job-seekers were tested to profile their occupational capabilities. Thereafter 'round pegs' could be guided towards 'round holes'.

The changing context

By the 1960s the Youth Employment Service's professionally qualified staff were working in very different educational and economic contexts compared with their pre-war predecessors. Full employment was maintained in most parts of Britain. Demand for youth labour swept away the old dead-end jobs, although there was still a difference between employment that offered systematic training and opportunities for part-time study, and other jobs. However, the latter offered the compensation of rapid progress to full adult earnings. Also, young people were staying in full-time education for longer. The statutory school-leaving age had been raised to 14 following the 1918 Education Act. In 1947, following the 1944 Act, it was raised to 15. There was legislative provision to raise the age to 16 when resources (school buildings and teachers) permitted, but this did not happen until 1972. Both the 1918 and 1944 Education Acts had envisaged, and provided for, full-time or part-time education to be made compulsory up to age 18. Just one LEA, Rugby, implemented this in the 1920s. Rugby believed that it was leading the field but no other LEAs followed, and Rugby rescinded the provision. It will be 2015 before the 'participation age' finally becomes 18, almost 100 years after this step was first planned. However, throughout the 1950s and 1960s increasing numbers of young people were staying on beyond the statutory school-leaving age. This trend has continued to the present day. The merger of different types of secondary schools into comprehensives, and the addition of a Certificate in Secondary Education (CSE) in 1965 to the GCE O-levels and A-levels that had replaced School Certificates in 1951, encouraged more and more young people to extend their educational careers. Increasing numbers of young people were making choices of courses while in education that would have long-term career implications. In this context the traditional menu of a school-leaving talk and interview was clearly inadequate, and the new aim of youth employment officers was to develop programmes of careers work which would commence early or midway through secondary schooling.

By the mid-1960s, youth employment officers, together with curricula on courses leading to the Diploma in Vocational Guidance (DVG) and subsequently the Diploma in Careers Guidance (DCG), were replacing or complementing differential psychology with theories derived from developmental psychology as the basis for their professional practice. Their revised aim was to facilitate the development of young people's own vocational thinking. Guidance became non-directive. Clients were assisted in making up their own minds. The careers adviser no longer decided 'which job' would be right for a client. Although the Youth Employment Service

continued to operate additional services (placement and the administration of National Insurance), its professionally qualified staff defined career guidance as their professional skill. Other Youth Employment Service work could be delegated to sub-professional staff. Ever since then, guidance – delivered to individuals and through group work – has been treated by staff of the Youth Employment Service and its successors as their core professional skill.

By the end of the 1960s, assisted by the collapse of the division between grammar and other secondary schools, the Youth Employment Service was succeeding in having its service accepted universally, as appropriate for pupils with all kinds and levels of ability. The service had lost its old image which was associated with finding jobs for early school-leavers. Retitling in 1973 as the Careers Service, a national ‘brand’ operated everywhere by the LEA, reflected the aspiration of the service’s professional staff. It was at this point that Britain became regarded as having developed (one of) the world’s best career guidance services. It was seen as among the best through employing specifically qualified career guidance staff, in being an educational service but with staff who were not employed by (and therefore partial towards) any specific schools or colleges, operating apart from adult employment exchanges and therefore specialising in assisting young people, and being a professional public service which always placed clients’ interests first, if necessary ahead of government efforts to implement specific education, training and labour supply policies.

1973–1994: the years of the Careers Service and the vanishing youth labour market

There are senses in which these years were a highlight in the history of Britain’s career guidance profession. Holders of the Diploma in Careers Guidance (DCG), which became the current Qualification in Careers Guidance (QCG), were unrivalled experts in their field. Their service was a national brand with a presence in every local authority and nearly every secondary school. However, in terms of the service’s subsequent history, the most significant feature of these years was the disappearance of school-leavers’ jobs. At the beginning of the 1970s around 70% of young people were leaving full-time education by age 16 and they nearly all stepped directly into jobs. Twenty years later, such ‘traditional transitions’ from school to work had become rare; less than 10% of young people entered full-time employment at age 16 (see Ashton, Maguire, & Spillsbury, 1989; Roberts, 1995).

Throughout the 1970s the shortages of employment for young people and adults were treated as temporary problems that would be overcome when the economy strengthened. The government’s response was a series of temporary measures. The main such measure to alleviate youth unemployment, the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP), was launched in 1978 with legislation that allowed it to run for no more than five years. Beyond this, it was believed, economic recovery would have made the programme unnecessary. The main provision within YOP was six months work experience with an employer. It now seems amazing that a main concern of employers at that time was that the programme should not compete with real jobs and enable school-leavers to shelter from the real labour market. Young people could qualify to enter the programme only after six weeks when they were registered as unemployed, and they were supposed to remain available for real jobs throughout, if required. By 1983 when its lifetime expired, YOP was being submerged by the still rising level of youth unemployment. It was around then that a consensus formed that

the old jobs would never return. We added 'economic restructuring' and 'de-industrialisation' to our vocabularies, and began to discuss an 'information age' and a forthcoming 'knowledge economy' which would require better-educated and trained, and better-qualified young people than the old industrial economy. Thus in 1983 YOP was replaced by a Youth Training Scheme that was intended to become a permanent fixture – a brand new bridge between school and work. By then a standard complaint of 16-year-olds after visiting their local careers offices was that 'they've got no jobs; they just try to put you on a scheme'. By the end of the 1980s 16-year-olds had abandoned the expectation of immediate employment. The Youth Training Scheme was first launched in 1983 as a one-year scheme. It was launched again in 1986 as a two-year scheme. There was a third launch in 1990 when the scheme was titled simply Youth Training. By then the proportion of 16-year-olds entering the scheme was in decline. Their preference, in the absence of jobs, was to continue in education pursuing academic or old or new vocational qualifications.

Additional Careers Service posts were created to enable the service to cope with the new workload of advising young people into, then through, their new options of training and post-compulsory education. However, the development with long-term significance for the career guidance profession was that staff lost direct contact with the labour market proper. By the time young people were exiting schemes and post-compulsory education, they were eligible and typically preferred to use the services that were routes into adult employment. This led to careers offices ceasing to operate labour (real employment) exchanges. Only Jobcentres (rebranded labour exchanges) specialised in real employment. This led to members of the profession defining themselves as career guidance officers rather than careers officers, and in 1990 they renamed their professional institute the Institute of Career Guidance.

By then, since 1988, most 16- and 17-year-olds had lost their former right to 'sign on' to claim unemployment benefit. The government's declared aim was to remove the 'option' of unemployment and to pressure recalcitrants into further education or training. Before long researchers had established that this change had created a group forthwith known as NEETs – young people who were not officially regarded as unemployed but who were in 'neither education, employment or training' (Istance, Rees, & Williamson, 1994). Another effect of this measure was to sever the Careers Service's remaining link with the National Insurance/social security system. Out-of-school and out-of-work 16- and 17-year-olds lost a former motive for signing on, and the Careers Service ceased to be involved in the administration of claims for unemployment benefit. Careers officers did not protest or regret the loss of either their placement/employment exchange role or engagement with the social security system. This enabled the service to concentrate on its staff's real vocation – the provision of career guidance.

1994–2001: the brief era of career guidance companies

If the economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s can be likened to an earthquake that shook the Careers Service, what followed can be likened to a series of rocket attacks from above by successive central governments. At the beginning of the 1990s the government announced that career guidance would cease to be a prerogative of LEAs. At the time the government was seeking to introduce a wider range of providers, and some market processes, into the delivery of public services. The first steps in this direction were with low profile, mainly local authority services such as

school meals, waste collection and disposal, the management of sport and leisure centres, and career guidance. Potential providers were invited to bid for contracts to deliver career guidance services in designated areas. The lead bidder could be a local authority, or a voluntary association, or a profit-seeking company. Competition for contracts was not on the basis of price but on the quality and character of the proposed service, and the capabilities of the would-be provider. A bidding consortium could include a local authority or authorities, commercial businesses (which might offer management skills and links with industry), and voluntary (typically youth) associations. So in 1994 the Careers Service 'brand' disappeared into history and was replaced by a plethora of new local brand names, previously unknown and now forgotten.

This new market in career guidance services was somewhat limited (see Watts, Hughes, & Wood, 2005; Watson & McKie, 1998). There was just one purchaser of publicly funded guidance for young people – central government. Young people and schools would normally use the one local provider. Whoever won a contract would inevitably use the same squad of guidance professionals. Career guidance staff noticed, and often complained about, changes in their work conditions. They experienced a new 'contract culture'; the service that they delivered had to meet the terms of a written contract. In practice, this invariably meant that all secondary school pupils had to be 'action planned' (see Chatrik, 1996). School teachers had voiced similar concerns and had spoken of deprofessionalisation when the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced a national curriculum and testing.

However, the major historical significance of the end of the former Careers Service was that it indicated a much broader change in the process of educational policy-making. When central governments in Britain first became heavily involved in education (with the 1870 Education Act), it was agreed by all the main political parties that major changes in education should be consensual. They recognised that it would disrupt children's schooling if there was a major set of changes every time there was a change of government. Up to and including the passage of the 1944 Education Act, it was necessary to achieve a broad consensus because so many schools were owned by churches. This remains the case in Northern Ireland where, as a result, implementing any major reform remains extremely difficult. All major education acts passed at Westminster (in 1870, 1902 and 1944) were preceded by lengthy consultation. The same applied when school examinations were introduced and changed: School Certificates after the First World War; GCEs in 1951; the addition of the CSE in 1965; then the merger of CSE and GCE O-levels in 1988. The 1988 Education Reform Act was different. This reform was planned solely by government ministers, their advisers in Whitehall and in 'think tanks' associated with the Conservative Party. A consequence for career guidance of the change in education policy-making has been exactly what was feared a century ago: career guidance has been subjected to a further major overhaul with every subsequent change of government.

Connexions, 2001–2011

The incoming New Labour government in 1997 had the reduction of youth unemployment among its top priorities. The first of a series of 'New Deals' was for 18–25-year-olds. 'Inclusion' was made a cross-departmental theme, and social inclusion was to be achieved via employment. The incoming government had also been convinced that containing unemployment among young people aged 18 plus

required the number of younger NEETs to be reduced, and decided that a new service should be given this task. This new service was Connexions, always a local authority service, into which the responsibilities of career guidance companies were collapsed (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).

Connexions could have been a superb initiative, one stop for young people seeking advice and assistance whether their issue was about education, training, employment, health, housing or offending. The lynchpin role of personal adviser could have directed clients to appropriate specialist help, when this was required. However, the service was obliged to prioritise reducing the number of NEETs as monitored in successive Labour Force Surveys.

There were inbuilt design flaws (see Watts, 2001), which would surely have become apparent and avoided given longer and wider consultation. Any service seeking to assist hard-to-place young people into education, training or employment needs to ensure that it is not identified with the problem groups. In other words, it needs to be used and valued by all young people. The Juvenile Employment Service, then the Youth Employment Service, had spent decades ridding themselves of the dole queue image. Making NEETs the priority target group inevitably deflected resources from what had been the career guidance companies' mainstream work of providing information, advice and guidance to entire cohorts of secondary school pupils. Schools complained about the dilution of the service they were receiving.

Also, by the time Connexions was launched in 2001, it was becoming known that achieving a significant reduction in the number of NEETs would be difficult, probably impossible (see Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006). In most areas at any time around 9% of the age group was NEET, and within this 9% there were sub-groups with very different characteristics and needs. One was temporarily NEET. Before long the young people would enter or re-enter education, training or employment without any intervention. The proportion of the age group that became NEET at some time or another was more than double those who were NEET at any single point in time. Another sub-group had serious problems concerning lifestyle issues (alcohol or drugs, for instance), domestic and family circumstances, or health that made neither education, training or employment realistic in the short term. This left the NEETs who were at risk of but could be diverted from becoming long-term unemployed. It was known that being NEET as a teenager increased the risks of later unemployment (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). Some NEETs could (potentially) be removed from this at-risk group, but the efforts of Connexions were dispersed throughout the entire NEET population which failed to contract significantly across the country.

Hence the incoming coalition government in 2010 declared Connexions a failure, claimed to be re-routing financial support for career guidance through secondary schools (though no ring-fenced nor any discernible new stream of income for schools was created). This latest metaphorical rocket from above was the immediate source of the anxiety and redundancies among careers advisers, and the decline in membership of their professional institute during 2011 and 2012.

Discussion

Vulnerability

The preceding historical overview has revealed how throughout the twentieth century the UK's 'profession' specialising in assisting young people during their

education-to-work transitions became increasingly specialised. It was born as a service for juveniles, and notwithstanding the aspiration to become an all-age guidance service, in England the profession's principal and ultimately sole clients became young people in secondary schools. What began titled as an employment service became progressively more distant from employment proper as young people's education-to-work transitions were extended. By the 1990s its staff were called career guidance officers, and their remaining links with the world of real work were arranging work experience for secondary school pupils, and advising entrants to the remaining employer-based training schemes. The service had ceased to be a prominent part of employers' strategies at the point of recruitment to real jobs. It was no longer involved when young people (the vast majority by the 1990s) made their transitions from training schemes, further or higher education into full-time, permanent and continuous employment. During this specialisation, guidance personnel had ceased involvement in the administration of social security, and employers did not rely on the service to sift applicants for real jobs.

In the meantime, members of the Institute for Career Guidance were facing competition on their prime turf. Further and higher education institutions had their own careers advice and appointments services. These professionals were organised separately. Even more threatening, secondary schools had 'professional' careers teachers. Until the 1960s a career teacher's role was unlikely to amount to more than making arrangements for visits by a youth employment officer and organising the school careers library. However, since 1969 careers teachers had possessed their own professional association, and many had become qualified for their specialist teaching role. Guidance professionals had always insisted that their own and the career teacher role were distinct and complementary but not interchangeable. Partnership was their preferred relationship (see McCrone et al., 2009; Watts, 2008). However, recent history shows that since the 1990s government ministers and much of Whitehall have been unconvinced. Career guidance professionals can be judged to have conceded defeat in merging, with effect from 2013, their own association with the main association of careers teachers in the Career Development Institute (CDI).

Decisions taken earlier in the history of the careers, youth and juvenile employment services may have looked (and been) right at the time, but subsequently became sources of vulnerability. There was the decision at the very outset to keep the Juvenile Employment Service well apart from the adult employment exchanges. Originally this created a complete school-to-work transition service dedicated to the needs of young people, but it resulted in the service becoming involved solely in the provision of information, advice and guidance as typical ages of transition into adult employment moved upwards. Career guidance staff who have entered the profession since the 1980s may never have heard a view expressed by many senior youth employment officers in the 1960s that the effectiveness of guidance needed to be proved by later placement.

In the 1920s and 1930s juvenile employment officers decided that occupational psychology should become the base for their professional expertise. This gave them psychometric tests with which to work. Subsequently the profession failed to embrace the emerging field of labour market studies and the evolution of personnel into human resource management. Today there is a glaring gap. There is no longer any profession or service that specialises in providing assistance throughout the entire school-to-work transition. Connexions might have become such a service but it was designed for a different and more limited purpose.

A further vulnerability has arisen from the demand for evidence of 'impact'. All public services are now expected to be able to prove that they deliver valued outcomes. In the case of state-funded professions, there is now an expectation that they will be able to demonstrate public as well as private benefits. The career guidance profession has (arguably mistakenly) accepted this challenge (see Killeen, 1996; Killeen, White, & Watts, 1998). The problem is that it proves impossible for the profession to offer convincing proof of ultimate public benefits. All guidance professionals know that they make a difference to the lives of (some) individual clients. They are also able to show that most clients express satisfaction with the service that has been delivered, and that the service has helped them with their educational planning and career thinking (see Howieson & Semple, 2001; Jones & Mortimore, 2004; Mortimore, Oleinikova, & Griseri, 2003). However, they are unable to demonstrate ultimate benefits to the economy (Howieson & Croxford, 1997). This is despite the main original case for the creation of employment exchanges being that they would reduce unemployment. We now know that they may churn the unemployed and thereby reduce the numbers becoming long-term unemployed, but guidance cannot create additional jobs.

Social science can rarely conduct controlled experiments, but suppose it was possible to find two areas perfectly matched for economic, occupational and employment profiles, education and population demographics. Then suppose that just one of these areas could be saturated with career guidance while nothing was provided in the other. What differences would we expect to find in the eventual employment of the areas' 25–30-year-olds? It is unlikely that there would be any difference. The identical employment opportunities would ensure that the outcomes were identical (see Roberts, 1968). There was always a catch in the boast that Britain had one of the world's best career guidance services. Maybe their guidance services were inferior, but Germany and the USA had equally if not stronger economies.

It is unlikely that career guidance can even create a better match between individuals and jobs – more workers and employers who are fully satisfied with one another, and more productive workforces. This might happen if an original assumption of differential occupational psychology was correct and there was one particular occupation into which each round or square 'peg' would fit perfectly. In practice, we now know that right up to the point of entering employment most young people are willing to consider a range of possible careers, and that occupational choices and identities typically harden only after individuals have entered their occupations (Roberts, 1968). Similarly, the pool of potential employees capable of performing well in any occupation is much larger than the number of recruits who are actually needed. This suggests that, unaided by guidance, normal labour market processes will achieve outcomes that are just as successful, from the viewpoints of employers and workers, as what happens with the intervention of guidance.

Assets

Career guidance cannot be justified in terms of economic outcomes. It has been, and will continue to be, provided in response to effective demand, not proof of effectiveness. The profession must have itself judged against realistic criteria. Irrespective of longer-term outcomes, individuals want to know what next steps are available to them at given career junctures, and the longer-term implications of taking each possible next step. Young people and their carers want this information

at ages 14, 16, 18 and beyond. Adults who are in or out of employment may also seek guidance.

There is plenty of latent demand for guidance but to become effective this demand must become manifest. This may take the form of clients who are willing to pay, but in Britain, as in many other countries, career guidance has traditionally been, and therefore there is a continuing expectation that it will be, offered as a public service. The electorate may exert direct pressure on politicians to provide this service. More likely, the pressure on politicians will be from schools and teachers who are unable to respond to students' queries and/or from employers who wish to avoid processing shoals of applications from blatantly unsuitable candidates. The future of career guidance in Britain will depend on the forms and strength with which demand becomes manifest.

Another asset is the existence of a mature career guidance profession whose members are capable of following the advice that they offer routinely to clients. They know that workers must be prepared to be flexible. They know that practitioners in all occupations can expect to have to make adjustments to their careers during their working lives. They are also capable of forming guidance consortia or operating as independent professionals.

Conclusions

The verdict must be attempted murder. There has been an attempt in England to cull a service perceived as redundant since secondary schools, like universities and many further education colleges, have become capable (even if less knowledgeable and skilled) of offering a service on which a distinct career guidance profession has increasingly concentrated. However, the outcome will be no worse than injury because demand for guidance has not been culled, and there is a capable body of professionals, sufficiently organised and politically efficacious to persuade the government to oblige schools to enable their pupils to access independent advice and guidance, interpreted as by someone suitably qualified who is not an employee of the school. The longer-term outcome of the murder attempt may even be regarded as reform. If so, this will take the form of a guidance marketplace where schools, further education colleges, universities, the National Careers Service and some private individuals are the purchasers, and where profit-seeking businesses in which guidance professionals may be partners or employees, independent practitioners and some voluntary associations (mainly youth organisations) offer guidance services, along with some local authorities who may continue to use the Connexions brand name (see also Watts, 2012). However, this outcome will not rebuild a service that supports young people throughout their education-to-work transitions for which the Juvenile Employment Service and the Youth Employment Service were originally designed.

Paul Bivand (2012) has argued for the creation of a new service for under-25-year-olds which combines career guidance with Jobcentre-Plus. Maybe the guidance should be alongside rather than fully merged into Jobcentre-Plus. The guidance could be from a specialist youth section of a national career guidance service. The impartiality of guidance can be guaranteed only by the regulation of practitioners by a professional work organisation. Ultimately, whether the guidance professional is an employee (of a school or Jobcentre) or an independent trader whose services are bought in will be rightly seen as irrelevant as regards the impartiality of the guidance offered to an individual client. Commercial professionalism (using expertise to give

purchasers what they want) must not be confused with public service professionalism (see Hanlon, 1998).

The historical vision and mission of the CDI should stretch beyond policing a register of qualified practitioners who then compete for business. The Institute of Career Guidance and its members are heirs to the ambitions of 1910 – to create a service that supports young people throughout their transitions from school to work. Decisions taken during the history of the service when it was the Juvenile then the Youth Employment Service may have been right at the time, but in the longer run they have sacrificed the original mission. The fateful decisions were to separate completely from adult employment services and to base professional practice squarely and exclusively on occupational psychology.

A further lesson from history is that a full career guidance service requires a combination of universalistic and particularistic knowledge. Universal knowledge (a body of theory, principles and practice that can be applied in any place and at any time) can be taught on professional courses and certified in professional qualifications. Career guidance needs this kind of knowledge, but it also needs particularistic knowledge – details of the provisions in the schools, colleges and universities that are offered by the various training providers, opportunities offered by major employers and the character of the labour market that are within the reach of individual clients. Such knowledge cannot all be stored in the heads of individual guidance practitioners. It needs to be the collective intelligence of the local service on which professionals can draw. This kind of intelligence cannot be built and retained by private contractors who can be replaced at the end of a contracted period. The architects of the 1909 and 1910 legislation were right in this respect – only a public service can deliver.

Notes on contributor

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