

Graduate Market Trends



In Brief

Employers' in-house training schemes to be accredited

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) has announced plans for accrediting the in-house training schemes of major companies, so that they lead to recognised qualifications.

The move is part of the government's drive to give employers a stronger role in shaping employees' skills to meet their needs and to give them a leading role in reforming vocational qualifications.

The Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has launched a consultation into how a national system of accreditation will work in practice. Major companies, including Sainsbury's and Vodafone, who are working with the government to get disadvantaged people skilled and into work through Local Employment Partnerships, will work towards having their own programmes fast tracked for accreditation.

For more information, see DIUS press release (12 September 2007) on www.dius.gov.uk

Increased support for full-time students in HE...

Full-time students from England starting university in 2008 will be offered increased financial support, but questions have been raised as to whether the changes are well targeted.

Under the new arrangement, full-time students from families with incomes of up to £25,000 will be entitled to the maximum non repayable maintenance grants, compared to the 2006/07 threshold of £17,500. Students from families with incomes of up to £60,000

will now also be entitled to a partial grant. In addition, graduates will have the option of taking 'repayment holidays' at a time of their choosing, for up to five years in total.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, however, pointed out that students from families with incomes below £17,500 will not benefit under the new arrangement. It suggests that if the government is keen to increase the number of higher education students from poorer backgrounds, the money would probably be better spent on trying to further improve school results rather than increasing subsidies for those who do make it to university.

For more information, see press releases at www.dius.gov.uk (5 July 2007) and at www.ifs.org.uk (23 July 2007).

...but part-time students still lose out

MPs have called for an urgent review of the current arrangements of support for part-time higher education students, saying that the distinction between part-time and full-time students for the purpose of fee and income support is now so blurred as to be no longer sustainable.

Citing the funding system in Australia as an example, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee called for students to be treated as one group with a variety of needs for support rather than being arbitrarily divided into categories of part-time and full-time.

The report, *The Future Sustainability of the Higher Education Sector: international aspects*, is available at www.publications.parliament.uk

continued on page 2

Contents

In Brief	1
Editor's notes	2
Articles	3
Social Media and How Students and Graduates Are Using It <i>Jayne Rowley (Graduate Prospects)</i>	3
Graduate Recruitment in 2007 and Outlook for 2008 <i>Pearl Mok (HECSU)</i>	4
Embarking on Higher Education (II): Futuretrack 2006 - The Bigger Picture <i>Professor Kate Purcell (University of Warwick)</i>	6
Putting Research into Practice HECSU Conference	8

Students at home suffer 'hidden disadvantages', says new research
Students who live at home may be better off financially, but they risk damaging their social skills and employability, says new research from Education Research Services, reported in education.guardian.co.uk (17 July 2007).

According to ERS Director Sarah Parkinson, young students who live at home with their parents are 'less likely to undertake optional work placements as part of their degree, less likely to undertake graduate level jobs on graduation, less likely to socialise with their fellow students because they remain in their pre-university social groups, and more likely to feel isolated from their peer group at university'.

Young students who live at home mainly do so for financial reasons, and for students from lower socio economic background, the study concedes that it is either they stay at home, or they do not go to university at all.

Too many graduates could spoil the value of a degree, says new report

A surplus of graduates in some non-scientific subjects could be just around the corner, suggests a study from the Institute of Education.

According to lead researcher Dr Anna Vignoles, some graduates in highly valued subjects, such as accountancy, will continue to profit from the amount they spent on their degrees. Others, such as those from arts and humanities courses, may gain only a small, or even a nil, return on their investment in higher education, and the oversupply of graduates could see this happening more and more.

Many, however, would still wish to go to university for non-economic reasons, says Dr Vignoles.

The researchers suggest tuition fees should vary according to subject and institution in order to make students realise what different subjects are worth.

See press release (7 September 2007) on <http://ioewebsserver.ioe.ac.uk>

What Do Graduates Do? 2008

The new edition of *What Do Graduates Do?* will be out in November. The annual publication takes information from HESA's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey to report on graduates from 2006, and what they were doing with their degrees six months after graduating, at the start of 2007.

263,050 UK-domiciled graduates received first degrees from UK universities in 2006 – up 6,590 on 2005; 79.5%, or 209,245 graduates replied to the survey.

71.9% of graduates were in work or combining work and study six months after graduating, marginally up on 2005, whilst unemployment, at 6.0%, was down and stood at its lowest level for six years.

What Do Graduates Do? is available at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/WDDGD

Editor's notes

In this issue of *Graduate Market Trends*, we feature a 'conference special' dedicated to the joint Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) conference, 'Putting Research into Practice', held on 12 June this year. For those who missed out on this great event, I hope you will find the summaries of presentations and discussions useful, and help you to consider how research findings can impact upon policy and practice within your own institution.

Although many of the conference topics covered would probably be of greater interest to career professionals and researchers, employers have not been neglected in this issue! In addition to our regular coverage on the state of the graduate labour market, for the first time, we look at the increasing popularity of social media and how it can be used to market to a new generation of students and graduates.

On the subject of social media, I am glad to tell you that Graduate Prospects, the commercial subsidiary of HECSU, is now on Facebook, where students and graduates can receive information on jobs and courses directly to their Facebook profile. Have a look at <http://apps.facebook.com/prospects/>

I hope you enjoy reading this latest issue of GMT.



Pearl Mok (Editor)

Graduate Market Trends
 is published by The Higher
 Education Careers Services Unit
 Prospects House
 Booth Street East
 Manchester M13 9EP
 t 0161 277 5200 f 0161 277 5210

Publisher and Editor
 Pearl Mok e gmt@prospects.ac.uk

Designers
 Simon Gurnhill/Chris Hicks

Price
 £15 (Annual subscription £50)

The Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) is a registered charity that supports the work of higher education careers services in the UK and the Republic of Ireland and funds major research projects that benefit the higher education careers sector. Its commercial arm, Graduate Prospects, publishes the Prospects series of graduate recruitment and postgraduate study publications and provides online information via the UK's official graduate recruitment site, Prospects.ac.uk

©2007 HECSU



Summary

Jayne Rowley, Publishing Director at Graduate Prospects, looks at the use of new media to market to a new generation of students and graduates, and gives advice on what recruiters and institutions can do to 'get it right'.

Web 2.0, MySpace, Youtube, Facebook, Blogs, podcasts – the so-called 'social media revolution' dominates the press and the internet daily. 'Ignore it at your peril', we are warned. At Graduate Prospects, we have been asking ourselves what this means for graduate recruitment and careers guidance. We surveyed current students and recent graduates about their online media habits in September 2006 and again in May this year. Three thousand individuals responded, representing 77 UK universities.

There are more voyeurs than participants

Our survey results reveal that:

- 80% of the respondents are using Youtube,¹ but only 14% upload videos to it. 88% use wikipedia,² increasingly preferring it over Google for factual search, although only 18% would contribute content to it.
- 66% download podcasts,³ up from 30% last September.
- 90% read blogs,⁴ but only 36% would write or comment on them.

User-generated content (UGC) is still a minority sport, expressed as the 1/9/90 model: 1% of users generate original content, 9% comment on or add to that content and 90% read/listen/watch ('our voyeurs'). So don't panic!

However, the number of voyeurs is huge and growing and the key is that they share the content with their friends and networks. Youtube has 200 million users, Facebook has 60 million and growing at 150,000 per day. The results suggest that for our market the content generators and commenters may also be higher than average.

It's a very muddy pool

This particularly applies to the social networks.⁵ Facebook has grown extraordinarily in the last six months (60% of our respondents use it) and

Social Media and How Students and Graduates Are Using It

MySpace (previously the most popular) is beginning to decline (used by 44% of our respondents). The key message is that they want to use this medium to connect to each other. It does not matter which network is the current favourite, we need to recognise that this sort of space is where our target market congregates and spends time. Eighty-six per cent of them (up from 40% last September) are members of at least one and visit their network four times a day. Facebook currently fits the target demographic best and this is likely to be the case for a couple of years. Over 100 UK universities already have a Facebook community and this is growing quickly.

Space Invaders

These media have been developed for social interactions and there is some resistance to recruiters using them. About half the respondents said they did not mind being communicated with in this way, with certain caveats. If the information is fit for purpose, adds some value and says something real, this would be acceptable. It is about communication and conversation, not advertising. Join the communities, make yourself available there and allow the students to find you, but do not push it.

Getting it right

- Blogging only works if you use good writers with something to say. The failed blog graveyard is crowded. Creating great and compelling online content takes real work and commitment.
- Getting the right balance between promoting your organisation and providing valuable information and content to the audience is tricky. Respect the boundaries and remember that it is their space, not yours.
- Promotion is the key. If you have created audio or video content, put it on Youtube, i-tunes and other podcast directories and link back to your recruitment or careers service websites. It is simple, quick and free and a fantastic viral marketing tool. Some recruiters are already doing this successfully. Twenty per cent of our

respondents said their university was using new media to deliver the main curriculum. If students are used to having their academic content in this way, they will be receptive to getting information on further study or employment through the same media.

- Join the dots. Make it part of your recruitment strategy, not separate. If your current graduate intake or interns have interesting projects and can write, create a blog on your website to follow them. If you are attending campus fairs and running events, promote them through Facebook. Make podcasts and videocasts of them and upload them to your recruitment website and also to Youtube. Work with universities' careers services. Some of them are already embracing these technologies. Make your resources available to them for their websites.

This is a wonderfully rich time to be working in recruitment and no one is getting it absolutely right yet. It is constantly changing with new players and tools coming online. You do need to be aware of what is happening and there are some great things you can take from the emerging technologies and environment both in terms of efficiencies and effectiveness. But do not lose sight of what is important – that whatever you do needs to reflect your recruitment objectives. Do as much or as little as you have time for, but do not ignore it, as it is here to stay.

Further information

1. www.youtube.com – video sharing site owned by Google.
2. www.wikipedia.com – online collaborative encyclopedia.
3. Podcasts - downloadable audio files. Accessed through computers and MP3 players.
4. Blog - online diaries (can be personal, social, corporate or expert).
5. Social networks - websites which people use to connect to each other and to share photos, music and videos. www.facebook.com and www.myspace.com are the two most popular.



Summary

According to the Association of Graduate Recruiters, graduate vacancies are forecast to see a year-on-year rise of 12.7% in 2007, a significant increase compared with only 5.2% for the previous year. The median starting salary is anticipated to rise by a more modest 2.4%, which corresponds to a median salary of £23,500 – a figure seen as competitive enough amongst many employers.

In the Spring 2007 issue of *Graduate Market Trends*, we reported what the graduate employment market was like for the 2006 recruitment season and the outlook for 2007.¹ Much of the information reported was based on a survey of employers conducted for the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) in November 2006 ('Winter Review').² This article, based on the latest AGR survey conducted in May and June of 2007 ('Summer Review'), is a follow-up of the earlier report, and includes a more up-to-date account of the expected recruitment and salary rates for 2007 and outlook for 2008.³

Tables 1a and 1b summarise the key salary and vacancy data published in the two AGR surveys.*

The 2006-07 graduate recruitment season

Vacancies

The number of graduate vacancies amongst AGR employers for the 2006-07 recruitment season is forecast to see a 12.7% increase over 2005-06. Although this is slightly lower than the forecast of 15.1% reported in the Winter Review, it is more than double the real year-on-year increase of 5.2% reported for 2005-06, and signifies that the graduate recruitment market is going strong. Amongst the 219 employers surveyed, a total of 20,413 graduates are expected to be recruited this year.

Graduate Recruitment in 2007 and Outlook for 2008

No company/business sectors are anticipating a decline in vacancies in 2007, and most are looking forward to a healthy growth. The banking and financial services sector is offering 465 more vacancies in 2007 compared with the previous year – the highest increase in the *absolute number* of vacancies amongst all sectors, and corresponds to a year-on-year *percentage* increase of 22.9%. This is followed by accountancy and professional services, where although the percentage increase is just 9.7% they have 416 more vacancies on offer than in 2006.

In terms of types of work, the AGR reported that consulting and financial management are doing 'exceptionally well' in 2007, with vacancy increases of 54.8% and 45.5% respectively.

It is important to note that the survey of AGR employers was carried out in May/June 2007, before the turmoil of the financial market in August as a result of the US mortgage losses. Since then, it was predicted that thousands of jobs may be lost in the City of London in months to come.⁴ What effects (if any) this will have on graduate recruitment remains to be seen.

In the earlier Winter Review, it was forecast that all regions in the UK would see a rise in graduate vacancies in 2007. In the latest report, however, Wales and the North West are predicting a 5.7% and 1.3% year-on-year drop in vacancies. Graduate recruitment in London and the South East, the two largest graduate employer regions, however, still appears healthy with vacancies expecting to be up by 8.8% and 24.2% respectively in 2007 over 2006.

Salaries

The median graduate starting salary amongst AGR employers for 2007 is forecast to be £23,500, up 2.4% on the 2006 figure of £22,953. In terms of business sectors, law firms are predicting the largest year-on-year increase in median starting salaries, at 15.2%, with the median figure standing at £35,700. In contrast, banking and financial services, despite reporting a buoyant increase in the number of vacancies in 2007, is experiencing a 2.7% year-on-year drop in the median starting salary, although, at £37,000, it is still the highest paying sector.

Two regions, London and East Anglia, have reported a fall in salaries in 2007 over 2006. The study, however, warned that the drop in salaries in London has to be interpreted with caution. Instead of widespread salary reductions in the region, only one London recruiter is, in fact, offering a slightly lower starting salary in 2007 than in 2006, with all other firms offering the same or higher salaries. Although the number of vacancies for higher paid positions in the region has remained stable between 2006 and 2007, there has been an increase in the number of positions with lower salaries, with the net effect being a year-on-year drop in the regional median salary.

Outlook for 2008

There is little sign of the graduate recruitment market slowing down in 2008. Half of the employers (49%) surveyed by the AGR expect graduate recruitment levels to be similar to 2007, just under three in ten (28.9%) expect to recruit slightly more graduates, and one in eight (12.3%) anticipate recruiting many more.

* Please note that salary figures from the AGR are reported by mainly large companies and organisations and the vacancies are aimed specifically at graduates. A substantial number of graduates, however, obtain posts which are not specifically targeted at degree holders. As a result, the average salary figures from the AGR are likely to be higher than the average graduate starting salaries sourced from student surveys such as the *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)* survey, as there is a bias towards larger firms and specific graduate jobs.

Table 1a. Key salary and vacancy data from *The AGR Graduate Recruitment Survey 2007: Winter Review*

Time of survey field work	November 2006
Report published	February 2007
Number of AGR employers surveyed	211
2005-2006 year-on-year change in graduate vacancies	+ 5.2%
2005-2006 year-on-year change in graduate starting salaries	+ 2%
2006 median graduate starting salary	£22,953
Forecast of 2006-2007 year-on-year change in graduate vacancies	+ 15.1%
Forecast of 2006-2007 year-on-year change in graduate starting salaries	+ 2.1%
Forecast of 2007 median graduate starting salary	£23,431

Table 1b. Key salary and vacancy data from *The AGR Graduate Recruitment Survey 2007: Summer Review*

Time of survey field work	May-June 2007
Report published	July 2007
Number of AGR employers surveyed	219
<i>Updated</i> forecast of 2006-2007 year-on-year change in graduate vacancies	+ 12.7%
<i>Updated</i> forecast of 2006-2007 year-on-year change in graduate starting salaries	+ 2.4%
<i>Updated</i> forecast of 2007 median graduate starting salary	£23,500

Employers' predictions on 2008 salary levels are more cautious, however. At the time of the survey, a quarter of the employers (24.9%) have not yet decided on salaries for the next year, but for the rest: two in five (39.8%) are expecting only a cost-of-living rise, another one in five (19.4%) anticipate salaries to increase above this level, and one in six (15.9%) are predicting no change from the 2007 rates.

Several reasons have been identified by AGR employers for the relatively modest increase in recent salary levels:

- Salaries are fine as they are; 'competitive enough'.
- Salaries have been increasing (too) fast and the slowdown is inevitable. Many employers have raised the issue of consistency with salaries paid to

previous years' graduate recruits and to other employees within the organisation. There is also a concern that graduate salaries could become out of line with the 'real jobs' graduates are recruited for.

- Salaries are fine as they are, for what graduates are bringing into the organisation.
- There are plenty of graduates on the market, despite the rise in demand.

A 'mirror survey' of 1,633 UK university students approaching the end of their course reveals that students are indeed realistic in view of their limited experience. They are conscious of the 'lessening exclusivity of a university education' and 'certainly agree with employers that the rapidly rising numbers

of graduates on the market mean that salaries have no need to increase as rapidly as vacancy levels.'

References

- 1 'Graduate recruitment in 2006 and outlook for 2007', *Graduate Market Trends*, Spring 2007. www.prospects.ac.uk/links/CSDGMT
- 2 *The AGR Graduate Recruitment Survey 2007: Winter Review*, produced for the AGR by Hobsons.
- 3 *The AGR Graduate Recruitment Survey 2007: Summer Review*, produced for the AGR by Trendence.
- 4 'Market woes 'to cost City jobs'', Will Smale, BBC News, 22 August 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6958462.stm>



Summary

In the Spring 2007 issue of *Graduate Market Trends* published earlier this year, **Professor Kate Purcell** from the **Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick** presented the key findings of the first stage of Futuretrack 2005 – the pilot study of Futuretrack 2006, HECSU's longitudinal study of 2006 UCAS applicants as they enter and progress through higher education. In this article, Professor Purcell discusses some of the preliminary findings of the first stage of Futuretrack 2006, which reinforce the 2005 findings and provide a more comprehensive picture of higher education applicants and their experiences.

Introduction

In 2005, the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) launched an ambitious programme of research, designed to explore the process of entry into and through higher education in more detail than had hitherto been attempted. This programme, *Career-making*, has at its core a major longitudinal study, Futuretrack, of all applicants to full-time UK higher education courses who applied through the Universities and Colleges Admissions service (UCAS) in 2006. This article presents some of the key preliminary findings from the first stage of this study, which was conducted in summer 2006, at the point where the majority of respondents aspired to embark on a full-time higher education undergraduate or sub-degree course in autumn 2006.¹

In advance of this 2006 major study, a smaller pilot study was launched in 2005 (Futuretrack 2005) with the primary aim to inform the 2006 study on the survey methodology. The results of the first stage of Futuretrack 2005 were reported in the article 'Embarking on Higher Education' in the Spring 07 issue of *Graduate Market Trends*.²

Success and failure in obtaining HE places

All 2006 UCAS applicants, a total of 506,304 individuals, were invited to participate in Futuretrack 2006 and fill in

Embarking on Higher Education (II): Futuretrack 2006 – The Bigger Picture

an online questionnaire. 129,020 responses were received, of whom 23,000 had not proceeded directly to full-time higher education study.^a Those applying as secondary school students, under 21, white rather than ethnic minority and UK rather than EU or other overseas students had a greater propensity to have received offers and accepted places under the main UCAS scheme, were less likely to enter through 'clearing', and less likely to end up without a place.

Why did students decide to apply to enter HE?

Applicants whose parents had participated in higher education (second generation applicants) were twice as likely as first generation applicants to have given as a reason 'it is the normal thing for somebody like me' (52% compared with 27%). Furthermore, two-fifths (40%) of the second generation applicants stated that their parents had encouraged them to apply, compared with just 25% of first generation applicants. Second generation applicants were also more likely to have been encouraged by their teachers to apply.

Conversely, first generation applicants were more likely to give career or employment-orientated reasons for their higher education application. Thirty seven per cent of applicants for whom neither parent had experience of higher education gave 'it is part of my longer term career plans' as their main reason, and 22% 'to enable me to get a good job'. This compares with 31% and 18% respectively of applicants whose parents had both attended higher education.

Teachers' encouragement was most likely to have been mentioned by those opting for physical sciences, linguistics and classics, languages, and historical and philosophical subjects. Conversely, careers advice was most likely to have been

regarded as influential by those opting for engineering and technology, mass communication and documentation, and most likely to have influenced those in the highest socio-economic category. To a considerable extent, although parental experience of higher education and socio-economic background are strongly related, parental experience of higher education appears to have a stronger impact on responses throughout the questionnaire than social background itself.

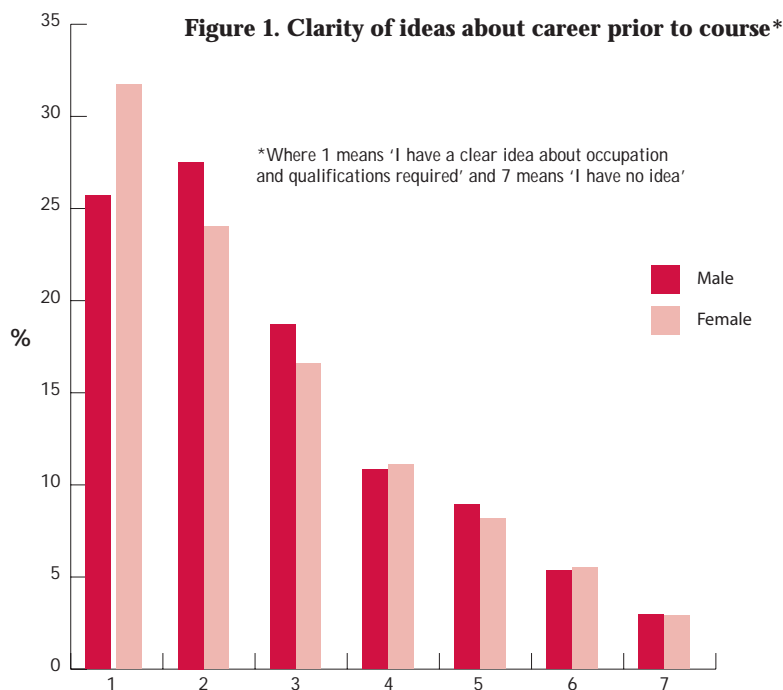
Clarity of ideas about career prior to course

Accepted applicants were asked where they would put themselves, on a scale of 1-7 where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about the occupation I hope to enter and the qualifications required for it' and 7 means 'I have no idea what I will do when I complete my course'. Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses and illustrates a stronger bias towards the 'instrumental' rather than the 'drifter' end of the scale. Age is found to be a significant factor: those aged 25 and older were the most likely to have given a rating of '1'.

Access to careers guidance and information

Clarity of career plans might be expected to reflect the extent to which applicants had access to careers information and guidance prior to making their choices of course. In deciding to apply for a higher education course around a quarter, 26%, agreed or strongly agreed that they needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study, and there appears to be a shortfall in the careers advice applicants received from schools. Whilst 61% agreed that teachers and lecturers were very helpful to them, just 35% felt the same way about the careers guidance provided.

^aThere are two respects in which the survey respondents varied significantly from the UCAS applicant population: respondents were more likely to be females and more likely to have high entry qualifications. The data have been weighted to take account of these biases in the analysis.



For those with graduate parents attending schools and colleges where the majority of students go on to higher education, this may be less of a problem, but for those without these advantages, lack of access to career guidance prior to higher education application leaves them vulnerable to making poorer choices.

Self-rating on skills

Applicants were also asked to rate themselves on self-confidence and the core skills of written and spoken communication, numeracy and computing skills. The results are shown in Figure 2. Respondents were most confident about their written communication, followed by spoken communication, and least confident about their numeracy.

As the programme of research proceeds, these will be related to the

respondents' career decision-making and options perceived and followed. The same questions will also be asked again at a later stage of the longitudinal study to assess the subjectively-perceived impact of higher education participation in different programmes of study.

Reasons for not moving on to HE

For those UCAS applicants who had not progressed into higher education, the most commonly cited reason was the decision to take a gap year. However, 22% reported low grades as the reason, and 18.9% replied that either the costs or the prospect of incurring debts (or both) had deterred them from entering higher education. Applicants from a routine and manual occupations background were the most likely to cite reasons of cost as putting them off higher education.

Next stage

This article presented some of the key preliminary findings of the first stage of Futuretrack 2006. More detailed analysis of the survey, as well as follow-up interviews with samples of respondents, are currently being conducted. A full report of the first stage of Futuretrack 2006 will be published towards the end of 2007.

Meanwhile, the second stage of Futuretrack 2006 – a follow-up survey of the 2006 UCAS applicants one year on, is now underway.^b Since Futuretrack is a longitudinal study tracking students' decision-making *as they make the decisions*, it will enable us to see how students are confronted by, and able to manage, the obstacles and opportunities that they encounter. It will also enable us to focus on particular issues or categories of students: students identified as experiencing particular difficulties, or particularly constrained by debt, the way that reasons for course choices affect paths taken, the impacts of subject choices, the longer term impact of taking a gap year or deferring study for other reasons, variables related to educational and career satisfaction and to access and progression to postgraduate study and further professional training. Perhaps most importantly, the findings will help to identify where further careers and career-planning information and guidance are required and where they are most effective.

Further information

For further information about Futuretrack, including preliminary findings from the first stage of this study, go to www.hecsu.ac.uk. See also our dedicated website for the study www.futuretrack.ac.uk.

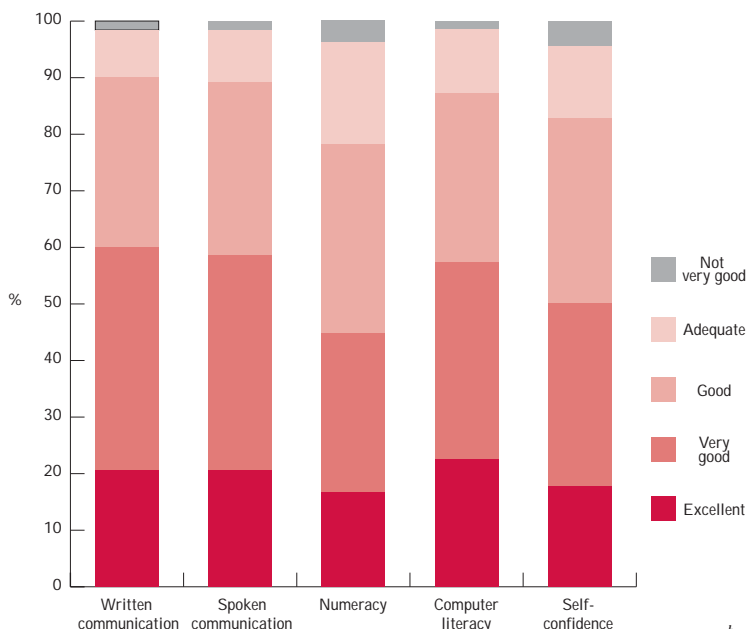
Futuretrack: part-time students

Futuretrack: part-time students is a new longitudinal study of part-time students in higher education. Like Futuretrack, it is part of HECSU's *Career Making* research programme. This new study aims to investigate part-time students' motivations, expectations and aspirations in studying, and how these influence their decision-making about work and careers. For more information, please contact Pearl Mok at futuretrackparttime@prospects.ac.uk

References

1. *Applying for Higher Education – Career Choices and Plans: Work in progress*, Kate Purcell, Peter Elias, Duncan Adam, Heike Behle, Ritva Ellison and Nick Wilton, June 2007. www.hecsu.ac.uk
2. The Futuretrack 2005 Stage 1 report, *Embarking on Higher Education*, is available at www.hecsu.ac.uk.

Figure 2. Self-rating on self-confidence and core skills



^b See the article 'Involving staff and students in research' on p.11 of this issue of Graduate Market Trends

Putting Research into Practice - HECSU conference

On 12 June 2007, the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) hosted a conference at the University of Manchester with the theme of 'Putting Research into Practice'. The conference aimed to address the issue of a perceived separation between those generating the evidence (researchers) and those conducting career guidance (practitioners). It revealed how practitioners, by conducting their own research and researchers, by working within practice settings, are challenging this separation and finding ways of creating new understandings about how to best support students and graduates.

Participants at the conference were informed of the latest findings from research and development projects. In particular, delegates were the first to hear about the results from the first main survey of Futuretrack and the innovative Putting Research Outcomes into Practice (PROP) project. There was also the opportunity to contribute to the debate on how findings can impact on practice to support career learning in higher education.

In the following sections, speakers at the conference give a summary of their presentations. To begin with, Jane Artess (HECSU) gives an overview of the PROP project and HECSU-funded practitioner research.

For more information about the conference and to join our discussion forum, go to www.hecsu.ac.uk

Bridging the Research and Practice Divide

Jane Artess, HECSU Research Manager

Putting Research Outcomes into Practice (PROP)

Aim and objectives

During the early planning stages of designing the HECSU longitudinal research programme, *Career Making* - the core of which was to become the Futuretrack study (see the article 'Embarking on higher education (II): Futuretrack 2006 - the bigger picture' on p.6) - someone said,

'I hope this research will be used to achieve something useful - it's no good if all it does is line our bookshelves.'

The sentiment was most forcefully put by a leading practitioner who had seen that previous eminent research work had been gathering dust whilst busy professionals struggled to find time to read it and consider the possible practice implications of the findings. At that moment was born a consensus that work must be undertaken to bridge the research/practice divide and to aim for the dual outcome of:

- improving practice by providing researched evidence;
- helping to ensure that research responds to the current needs of practitioners (and those working directly with students and graduates).

Consequently, a new component called 'Putting Research Outcomes into Practice' (PROP) was added to the *Career Making* research programme, to run alongside it till 2011, with a remit to:

- create a forum for practitioners and researchers to collaborate on the development and dissemination of practice in careers education and guidance (CEG) in higher education in the UK.

With the following objectives:

- to assist practitioners to consider how research informs practice;
- to assist researchers to develop questions and themes relevant to practice;
- to develop innovative approaches to practice issues;
- to coordinate with other relevant initiatives;
- to disseminate activities openly;
- to contribute to policy formulation,

and outcomes:

- networked learning community focused on provision of CEG in higher education;
- range of CEG materials available electronically;

- short, accessible publications such as the HECSU Research Notes series (see www.hecsu.ac.uk).

Progress to date

We were aware that the issue identified above is not new and that what was required was an injection of creative thinking. Peter Hawkins and the team at the Graduates into Employment Unit (GIEU) at the University of Liverpool had been in discussion with HECSU at the time about stimulating an 'ideas factory' amongst career guidance professionals in higher education to develop new ways of thinking about careers education and guidance materials. Putting both ideas together led to the setting up of PROP which comprises a group of experienced professionals and researchers working collaboratively and innovatively. There are around 25 regular PROP participants who were 'volunteered' (some say, knobbed!) by their colleagues, by HECSU/GIEU or by themselves. Twenty-five is a manageable group size and is large enough to include those with contrasting experience of career-related work. However, the group is by no means an exclusive one and other

participation is always welcomed. Three residential events have been held since its inception in July 2006 and a number of interesting projects have emerged (three of which are reported in this issue of *Graduate Market Trends* by Ros Healey, Becka Currant and Kate Purcell/Paul Jackson – see the section on PROP on p.10.)

Participants in PROP have reported the following immediate outcomes:

- encouragement to develop culture of personal development amongst (careers) service staff;
- professional support - energising - confidence in approaching researchers;
- provides structure for professional reflection;
- establishment of a research post within the careers service;
- stimulated thinking about how research can be used;
- more inclined to take risks; to innovate.

Equally, challenges are articulated as:

- not all research is the same or of the same apparent value;
- much research is written for other researchers - the missing step appears to be articulating what practitioners can do about/with it;
- there is a need for a clear framework of principles and values to underpin PROP and the exposition of models or ways of working.

Inevitably PROP participants have shared practice - both accounts of practice and underlying conceptions. One member raised the possibility that PROP may achieve most by not setting out to uncover and promote 'good' or 'best practice', but could instead seek 'powerful practice', that is, practice that has an impact on the context in which it occurs

(a stance that recognises that each institutional context is unique). This approach involves developing not only good descriptions (of practice or research findings) but also identifies key questions to be used in both practitioner-reflection and by researchers involved in the analysis of data.

Practitioner research

A parallel initiative is also being funded by HECSU to stimulate practitioner research. Here, small amounts of funding may be bid for to undertake local (context-specific) research projects. The example provided on p.13 by Paul Greenbank and Sue Hepworth of Edge Hill University is of a practitioner research project which combines the expertise of a researcher and careers adviser working together to deepen their understanding of (in this case) the needs of students from 'widening participation' groups. Other recent projects have included the development of *Jobsearch On-line* by Strathclyde and a project exploring the pathways for students/ graduates entering the *voluntary or community* work sectors - find out more from the section on Practitioner Research on p.12).

Unlike HECSU's major research projects, which are conducted by leading research departments, 'Practitioner Research' is unlikely to have been commissioned and there is no project specification drawn up by HECSU. The aim of practitioner research is:

- to support practitioners in the creation, development and dissemination of knowledge.

The inclusion of terms such as *creation* and *development* requires that research undertaken be focused on professional

agendas that may be highly localised and specific in application. Practitioner enquiry provides an opportunity to experiment with an aspect of practice. Individuals or teams will be encouraged to use an 'action frame of reference' (which is a broadly cyclical model of review and improvement) and to present ideas about how the research project has potential to enhance their own and others' practice. Figure 1 illustrates this.

Proposals for practitioner research funding are considered on the basis of the following criteria, that they should make contribution to:

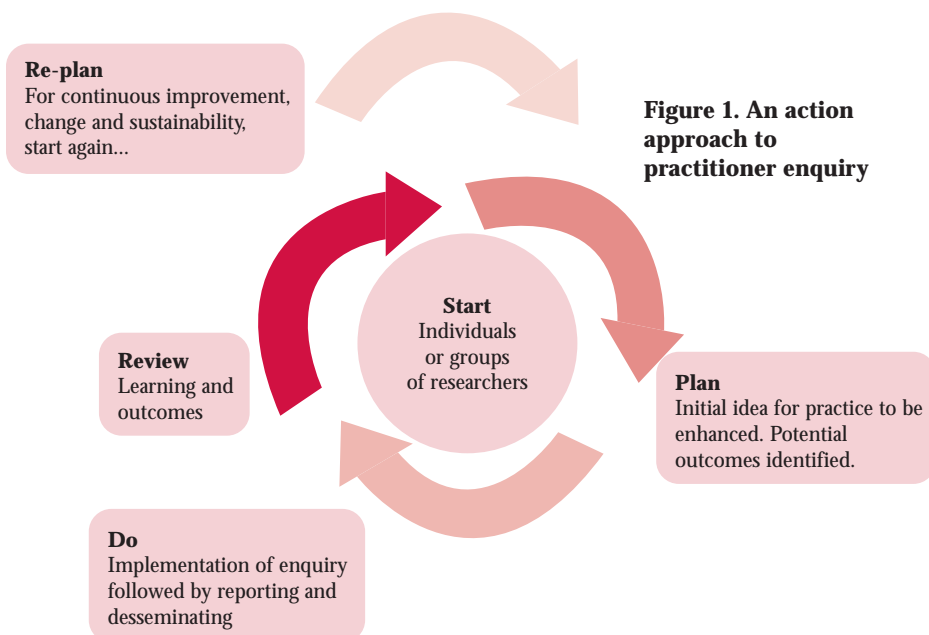
- the advancement of education of students and graduates;
- the career development and progression of students and graduates;
- the professional practices of careers advisory and other staff in higher education;
- developing innovative ways of working;
- the creation of knowledge about student and graduate career development, employment and learning.

Both the PROP project and the practitioner research projects, therefore, aim to do very similar things, albeit via rather different starting points, but neither PROP nor practitioner research will be able to enhance the experiences of students/graduates unless outcomes are widely disseminated. The HECSU website is one way to do this, as is the convening of conferences such as that held on 12 June of this year. One new method of disseminating, particularly PROP work, is via a Moodle virtual learning environment created by Becka Currant of University of Bradford (see p.10). As yet in embryonic form, it is hoped that this vehicle will be able to extend participation to a much wider range of interested colleagues.

The next steps

The PROP group is currently working on developing a (learning) model that enables the exploration of the intersection of three spheres of knowledge - *public knowledge* (that which is published, written by researchers, refereed etc), *professional knowledge* (that which is understood, interpreted, passed on via training/staff development/practice etc) and *new knowledge* (that is, insights and innovations gained from researchers and practitioners working together). The topic chosen for the group 'to get its teeth into' concerns a re-conceptualisation of careers education! If the foregoing has whetted your appetite for more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at j.artess@prospects.ac.uk

Figure 1. An action approach to practitioner enquiry



More on Putting Research Outcomes into Practice (PROP)

The following three workshops given at the HECSU/HEA conference:

- Using VLE Moodle to put research into practice
- One Brave Step in Coaching
- Involving staff and students in research

provided an overview of some of the projects that have emerged from the PROP initiative (as discussed in the earlier article 'Bridging the Research and Practice Divide' on p.8).

Using Moodle to Put Research into Practice

Becka Currant, Senior Adviser, Learner Development Unit, University of Bradford

This session focused on providing participants with an overview of how Moodle has been used to support the collaboration and networking of colleagues within the HECSU PROP community.

Moodle, an open course management system ('geek speak' for virtual learning environment, VLE), was chosen for a number of different reasons. These included:

- A need for an area to share ideas and files between members of PROP but using something different to e-mail.
- The site needed to be accessible by all and could not, therefore, be hosted within one institution's current VLE.

- The site needed to be protected from public access, but open to guests.
- It had to be low cost – Moodle is free!
- It needed to be flexible enough to accommodate different needs, from sharing files to supporting the use of discussion forums, blogs and wikis.
- Finally, there was experience within the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) of using Moodle to design an online learning course.

The session demonstrated to participants some of the more interactive elements of Moodle, including the use of discussion forums. Within the PROP Moodle site, a 'social noticeboard' has been established

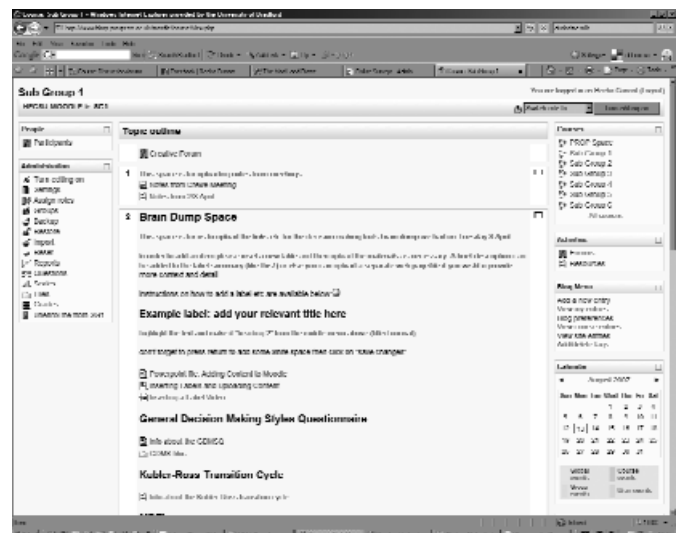
which enables any participant to post a message and read what other people have posted (see Figure 1). Examples of the types of messages posted are introductions from people, questions about content within the site and links to articles and websites of interest. In addition, the PROP community has been split into project groups and each project group has access to a private idea discussion space to enable them to progress their ideas (see Figure 2).

Towards the end of the workshop, participants were able to engage in discussion with each other about how they might use this type of tool in their work to collaborate with colleagues.

Figure 1. The social noticeboard in Moodle



Figure 2. Private sub-group discussion space



One Brave Step in Coaching

Ros Healy, Associate Head of the Centre for Employability, University of Central Lancashire

A sub-group of the PROP (and guests) consisting of nine participants met over a two-day period in Wharfedale in early April 2007. Our purpose was to put into practice the One Brave Step, which emerged as a goal from a PROP gathering.

Our One Brave Step was to inform ourselves about coaching and how it might enlighten our work with students and graduates, specifically in helping them in career decision-making and to develop a toolkit or resource that could be made freely available to our colleagues to support decision-making. The event was facilitated by Zoë Dawes, an experienced coach and trainer based in Cumbria (www.chartwellcoaching.co.uk).

Zoë modelled the sessions on a coaching approach so that we would

directly experience the processes that help us make decisions. Before the meeting, we were encouraged to consider:

- What two things we would like to come away with from this workshop.
- What single question we would like answered through the workshop.
- Which model (or models) of decision making that we currently use - either implicitly or explicitly.

After a productive and exciting two days' experience, this was followed up with:

- What was most significant for me from the two days?
- What does that tell me about myself and my work just now?
- What do I need to do to ensure that I keep hold of these things?

- When am I going to do that?
- If I had to share one thing from the programme, what would it be and who would it be with?
- What do I need to do to get more support for all of this?

So what was the outcome? After brainstorming as a group all the decision-making support ideas, we decided that a most useful outcome would be to each take one or more that we knew about and had used, to briefly outline it or cite links, books etc and to log these on our Moodle site. We would then make the resource or toolkit available to the profession in some way or another.

The resource is now available on the HECSU Moodle site.

Involving Staff and Students in Research

Paul Jackson, Head of Student Support and Development Service, University of Leicester, and Professor Kate Purcell, Director of the Futuretrack Survey Programme at the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick

This workshop presented a project initiated and developed at the PROP workshop and subsequently by Paul Jackson and Kate Purcell, to initiate a general discussion about the potential to improve communication and mutually-useful collaboration between researchers and careers practitioners.

The presenters described how the project has been built around the current Futuretrack longitudinal study of full-time higher education UCAS applicants, beginning with the design and testing of the Stage 2 online questionnaire, to be released in summer 2007 at the end of what, for most of the original 130,000 respondents at Stage 1, was their first year of higher education.^a The careers teams at the universities of the West of England, Leicester, Warwick and Westminster signed up to work with the researchers and in spring 2007, set up questionnaire-testing workshops where first year students were recruited and given a small incentive to spend an hour working through the draft

questionnaire, discussing their experience of doing so, and how well they felt the questionnaire worked in terms of the issues covered and the format of questions. For the research team, this identified weaknesses and ambiguities in the questionnaire. The range of student experiences provided at these different universities clarified where questions did and did not work for different kinds of students: those on lab-based rather than library and seminar-based courses, those with a strong vocational work-based element, and the perspectives of students in different situations – for example, studying as a mature or overseas student. It was only in testing the questionnaire that the complexity of some of these issues – and refinements to research design required to take account of them – became clear.

The benefits to the research team are obvious. In addition, several of the careers consultants who had participated in these exercises were at the workshop and described how they had found the

discussions that followed the questionnaire-completion revealed insights into students' understanding of career planning, awareness of their services and information needs. In the longer-term, they appreciated how the workshops were contributing to better research design and the likelihood that better, more useful information would be produced as a result.

The conference workshop generated an enthusiastic response for such activities and it was apparent that the lessons learned from this exercise could be 'rolled out' to other careers advisers and researchers via AGCAS workshops, or to specific careers advisory professionals in different higher education institutions or regions, using relevant research to develop effective working partnerships.

The next phase of the project, a programme of day-long 'work-shadowing' meetings between members of the research and careers advisory teams has already begun and promises to be equally valuable to all concerned.

^a For key findings of Stage 1 of Futuretrack, see the article 'Embarking on Higher Education (II): Futuretrack 2006 - The Bigger Picture' on p.6.

More on practitioner research

The following three projects are examples of practitioner research funded by HECSU, as discussed in the article 'Bridging the Research and Practice Divide' on p.8:

- Career pathways for graduates into the voluntary/community sector
- Researching working class students and the career decision-making process
- What do graduates do (Scotland)?

Results and progress of the projects were presented at the HECSU/HEA conference. This section provides summaries of the discussion held at the workshops.

Career pathways for graduates into the voluntary/community sector – research progress to date

Fiona Christie, Careers Consultant, University of Manchester Careers and Employability Division

Aims

The aim of this practitioner research project is to build a picture of the nature and range of opportunities for graduates in the voluntary/community sector with a particular focus on management and administration roles.

The research aims to explore areas such as management, administration, fundraising, HR, marketing, PR, finance, IT, volunteer management, policy and research. The choice of this scope was influenced by the fact that these are some of the areas for which the sector is experiencing skills shortages.

Context

Figures from the *Voluntary Sector Almanac 2006* show that there is a steady growth of employment opportunities in the sector: 608,000 work in the sector which is an increase of 8% since 2000. High proportions of the sector staff are in the higher occupational categories and over a third are degree holders - a higher proportion than the private or public sectors.

There is also a favourable policy context: all sides of the political spectrum want to use the voluntary sector more, especially in the delivery of public

services. As a result, public money is going into developing the sector's infrastructure. According to Elaine Smethurst, Manager of Working For A Charity, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO): "NCVO aims to develop a strategic initiative across the sector which will offer structured career entry opportunities at different stages of people's careers: one strand will be to encourage university and college graduates".

Methodology

HE careers consultants survey

There were 69 responses to this survey representing 50 institutions. There was considerable consensus amongst respondents. The majority said that the students they worked with who wanted to work in the sector were concerned with ethical issues when deciding on their career path. They also reported that getting into the sector was perceived by students as difficult.

"I find clients can be very frustrated by the lack of transparent schemes and entry points for graduates in comparison with the commercial world. They hold that against us in the careers centre, thinking we don't choose to promote the voluntary sector. We spend a lot of energy trying to redress that balance."

A common issue of concern relates to finance and problems in undertaking unpaid relevant work experience. There was also a strong sense that there were employment opportunities but students need to be proactive in finding them.

Graduate case studies/interviews

To date, 35 of these have been conducted.

Most, though not all, individuals have done considerable volunteering before getting a job in a charity:

"I had bought into the myth that you have to volunteer for months or even years to get a good job in the sector - I'm sure that is the case for some of the high-profile national organisations, but it's not the case everywhere."

Most interviewees acknowledged that pay in the sector does not compare favourably to some other graduate fields of work, but there appeared a common view that this was a compromise that was made in choosing a career that they could strongly identify with, or believe in.

Further information and outcomes

Findings from the research are currently being analysed. Anyone who would like further information or would like to contribute can contact me at Fiona.christie@manchester.ac.uk or on 0161 275 2828. The major outcome of this research will be a publication for students and their advisers about getting into the sector, distilling the findings from the research. In addition, a report for the voluntary sector workforce hub, based on the higher education consultants survey, will also be prepared.

Researching Working Class Students and the Career Decision-Making Process: Progress to Date

Sue Hepworth, Senior Careers Adviser and Dr Paul Greenbank, Reader in Educational Development at Edge Hill University

Introduction

From February to May 2007, Sue Hepworth and Paul Greenbank of Edge Hill University undertook HECSU-funded practitioner research. The qualitative research project examined how students from working class backgrounds (defined as unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual occupations) make career decisions. It is argued that such students are disadvantaged in the graduate labour market.¹ Our research looked at the rationale behind the approach adopted by students and whether this contributed to their disadvantage.

Research methodology

An initial survey of final year students from a range of subject areas studying at Edge Hill University resulted in the return of 165 questionnaires. This was followed by in-depth interviews with 30 students. The data from these interviews is currently being analysed.

Existing research

The literature on social class suggests that decision-making is likely to be influenced by a person's class environment or 'habitus' and, in particular, by the economic capital (i.e. financial resources), social capital (i.e. networks) and cultural capital (i.e. values and dispositions) they possess.² As such, the working class are perceived to have limited financial resources³ and lack 'useful' networks⁴. They are also said to lack a future orientation⁵ and value informal rather than formal information⁶, which militates against the adoption of a rational approach to career decision-making⁷. Finally, it is argued that the working class have low aspiration levels.⁸

Findings

Our study suggests that the working class is not homogeneous and, therefore, the factors influencing career decision-

making are in reality more complex and nuanced than is suggested by much of the existing literature. We should, therefore, be careful of making generalisations.

Despite the identified differences we did, however, distinguish some common themes:

- Role models drawn from a limited range of contacts had a powerful influence on students.
- Few students had started their job-search, often planning to 'take a break' in a lower level job for six to 18 months.
- Despite recognising their parents' lack of knowledge, students did not use the Careers Centre, often because they did not 'know' the staff.
- Contrary to other research, students in our study had realistic career aspirations in terms of level, salary expectations and appropriateness to degree subject.
- Students lacked geographical mobility, preferring to stay in their home region.
- Career choices were often limited to jobs related to their degree or those done by people they know.
- Students lacked an understanding of the nature of the graduate labour market in terms of university status and competition for jobs.
- Students had often gained useful skills via extra-curricular activities, but had made little conscious attempt to develop their employability.

Conclusion

During the academic year 2007/8 our findings will be used to inform guidance at Edge Hill University via action research with the Careers Centre. We will consider practical issues such as how to help students to 'know' careers staff and how to factor in the influence of role models, as well as wider issues such as whether the heterogeneity of the working class militates against offering 'extra help'

and whether we educate our students about potential 'barriers'.

The research is due to be completed in 2008. For further information please contact: hepworts@edgehill.ac.uk

Indicative references

1. Purcell, K., Morley, M. & Rowley, G. (2002) *Employers in the New Graduate Labour Market: recruiting from a wider spectrum of graduates*, Employment Studies Research Unit/The Council for Industry and Higher Education, Bristol and London.
2. Bourdieu, P. (1997), 'The forms of capital', in A.H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A.S. Wells (eds.) *Education – culture, economy, and society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 46-58.
3. Pennell, H. & West, A. (2005), 'The impact of increased fees on participation in higher education in England,' *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2, pp. 127-137.
4. Pollard, E., Pearson, R. & Willison, R. (2004) *Next Choices: career choices beyond university*, Report 405, Institute for Employment Studies, Brighton.
5. Robertson, D. & Hillman, J. (1997) *Widening Participation in Higher Education for Students from Lower Socio-Economic Groups and Students with Disabilities* (Report 6 for the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education), The Stationery Office, London.
6. Ball, S.J. & Vincent, C. (1998), 'I heard it on the grapevine': 'hot' knowledge and schools choice', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 19, pp. 377-400.
7. Law, B. & Watts, A.G. (2003) *The DOTS Analysis – original version*, The Career Learning Network, Cambridge.
8. Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2005) *Graduates from Disadvantaged Families – early labour market experiences*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Polity Press, Bristol.

'What Do Graduates Do?' Scotland

Charlie Ball, Labour Market Analyst, HECSU

14

In the absence of the scheduled speaker, Charlie Ball of HECSU delivered a workshop on the What Do Graduates Do? Scotland project, funded by HECSU, Futureskills Scotland, Careers Scotland and Strathclyde University Careers Service.

The project is designed to provide an overview of destination data for graduates from Scottish universities, analogous to the national publication, *What Do Graduates Do?* This will help students and guidance professionals by providing a reliable, accessible information source on the Scottish graduate labour market scene. It will also act alongside existing data resources from the Teaching Quality Information project, and from Scottish organisations, to provide a clear picture for stakeholders wishing to explore the employment of Scottish graduates.

What Do Graduates Do? Scotland used data from the HESA Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey 2004/5, to examine the outcomes of graduates from Scottish universities at all levels from 2005, six months after they graduated. The data was then grouped using the methodology from the national publication to gain a picture of outcomes and job destinations for graduates from Scottish institutions. It also contains articles on issues in the Scottish graduate labour market to supplement the data.

The workshop did not present a great deal of the data produced in the project as this was still largely in draft form.^a Scotland was found to produce just under 10% of the national first degree graduate population in 2005, and to have a higher proportion of female graduates than the national population.

Initial outcomes for first degree graduates were generally more favourable than those for the whole country. Employment and further study rates were higher than those for the whole UK. Scottish graduates were also more likely to go to work outside the UK, and the Republic of Ireland is known to be a popular destination for graduates from Scotland. The proportion of Scottish graduates taking doctorates, going on to teaching and studying professional qualifications was higher than for the UK as a whole, whilst unemployment was significantly lower.

The employment picture was dominated by the health sector, with a much higher proportion of Scottish graduates entering health-related employment than for the UK as a whole. Scottish graduates, however, were proportionally less likely than the UK as a whole to enter almost every other type of employment, with engineering being a notable exception. The arts and media, and sales and marketing positions showed

this effect the most strongly.

It is envisaged that *What Do Graduates Do? Scotland* will be freely available online, and the workshop sought to explore how the information might be delivered, and where it ought to be available. Future developments were also discussed, and a number of possibilities have been identified. It would be useful to be able to illustrate outcomes at postgraduate level with information on the real occupations obtained by individual graduates. Also considered potentially valuable were examinations of Scottish graduate outcomes on a regional level, analysis of graduate underemployment, and work to try to determine the graduate salary premium for different subjects.

Comparative information on the differences between Scotland and the UK as a whole, and examination of Scottish performance against OECD countries were also proposed. More detailed information for international students was also thought to be potentially worth including if it were possible to gather it.

Reference

1. *What Do Graduates Do?*, HECSU/AGCAS. www.prospects.ac.uk/links/WDGD

^a The report is now available at www.hecsu.ac.uk

Other workshops

The following section is a summary of most of the other workshops held at the HECSU/HEA conference, including:

- On-campus student employment: research from America
- The changing face of CaSE
- Building research networks: where next?
- 'Jobshopping': Turning chance to choice
- Retail work experience

On-Campus Student Employment: Research from America

Professor Philip Sullivan, Projects Director at De Montfort University

A Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) project

This parallel session discussed the first findings of a HEFCE Leadership, Governance and Management Fund project concerning the innovative approaches to student employment of Northwest Missouri State University and the subsequent careers advantages offered on graduation. Whether the approaches taken are appropriate for UK education is for individual institutions to decide, though the benefits for student recruitment, achievement and retention, graduate employability, careers and alumni involvement have prompted much interest.

Brief background

Having commenced student employment some 20 years ago, Northwest now employs 17% of students for around 15 hours per week, which includes 50% of overseas students. What makes Northwest different from other US universities is that students are employed in all academic and support departments, some in positions of visible responsibility. For example, five students work in the vice-chancellor's office; alongside everyday tasks they manage the office's student feedback system, draft speeches,

manage data, organise events, and more. Most, perhaps all, of the staff are strongly supportive of the student employment policy, though it took some years of trial, error and uncertainty to allay apprehensions.

An example: Talent Development Center

In one of the hundred or so video clips taken by the project, Northwest's vice-chancellor, Dr Dean Hubbard, explains that the 'breakthrough' came with the establishment of the Talent Development Center (TDC) '...because the benefits were so obvious...'. This centre, which in many ways typifies the university's support for its students, is based in the belief that all students can improve their learning achievements. Here, two regular staff and over 60 trained student employees meet individual or small groups of students by appointment to help improve their subject knowledge, grades, learning skills and employability. The improvement in retention as a result is estimated at around 10%. Some of the TDC's employees have the title of 'Supplemental Instructors'. These tend to be students who gained an 'A' in a subject; they are invited, usually by academic staff, to retake the course (module) and to hold

after-hours sessions for students to discuss the course content and learning points. In the spirit of talent development such sessions are attended by students who are concerned about their understanding of the course, as well as those who want to raise their likely 'B' grade to an 'A'. Northwest has found that peer learning is a powerful thing. Over 3,000 students have direct contact with the TDC in a year, and around 90% will have at least one contact during their time at the university.

Relevance to UK higher education?

The students, staff, parents and graduates recorded by the project all agreed that on-campus student employment is a good thing. While there are many similarities between the UK and the US, America is a different culture and what succeeds there may not necessarily be successful here. That said, given the rising numbers of students, the need for many to earn money during their education, the desire of many students to gain employment skills, and the moral imperative to support first generation and hitherto modest academic achievers, it is possible that some of the findings of the HEFCE funded project will be of interest to some institutions.

Further information

For details of the February 2008 dissemination events please contact project member Prof Philip Sullivan at psullivan@dmu.ac.uk

The Changing Face of CaSE (Careers and Student Employment)

Valerie Metcalfe, Director of Careers and Student Employment at the University of Westminster, London

16

Over the last few years, careers services have become accountable. Never before in the UK have we been scrutinized so extensively. We have quality assurance processes, compliance standards to meet, key performance targets and benchmarks to hit. Personally, I have welcomed these changes, although the associated increase in workload has proved challenging on several occasions. I believe, however, that these changes have helped us to not only align our objectives more closely to those of our institutions and those given by the wider government agenda such as employability, but also given us the impetus to clarify and celebrate our achievements.

Our ability to research, evaluate, reflect and record on our service provision to our stakeholders, e.g. students, graduates, academics, employer organisations, has only added to our credibility. We have been able to show and promote the full reach of our activities and their likely impact. This can only be a good thing – particularly if we are willing to consult and listen to our users – and take appropriate action to try and improve our offer.

At the University of Westminster, in which I have been Director for six years, I have overseen many changes. There are two that stand out. The first was getting

the Vice Chancellor and senior management backing to my request in 2001 for a University-wide employability strategy and implementation strategy group, which I now chair and which has gone from strength to strength. The other was putting my own house in order so to speak, regarding diversity and staffing. Instead of just lobbying employers to be more proactive I made a commitment early on to increase the diversity of the CaSE staff profile. This has been achieved, always on-going, through the implementation of new recruitment and selection methods and valuing a wider range of skills and achievements. I think it has made it a more interesting place to work and made it an easier place for our students and other users to access.

To give you a brief flavour of other areas that have changed the face of CaSE I have given some examples below:

- Staff are our greatest resource: systems and processes have been established to enable staff to contribute to the department's planning and implementation, e.g. across team approach to marketing, ICT.
- A business review was conducted involving consultation with senior management of the University, our users and, of course, our own staff.

The outcome was the restructuring of the department with more clearly defined personal objectives.

- Increased involvement in learning and teaching at a strategic and operational level, e.g. CaSE member of University committee, careers consultant present regularly at L & T symposiums, career management skills taught in the curriculum by careers consultant, producing a Skills Guide for academics.
- Being pro-active in taking forward projects and research studies, e.g. running an Enterprise Club linking SMEs and voluntary organisations, exploring the potential of blended learning in Career Management Skills, identifying the career needs of part-time business students, and piloting and evaluating the web-based career needs of PhD students.
- Greenhouse sessions (inspired by Dr. Peter Hawkins and PROP): an inclusive process to allow staff a creative space to look at issues such as 'Generation Y', the future design of CaSE and career theories.

If you are interested in finding out more do feel free to contact me:

V.Metcalfe@westminster.ac.uk

Building Research Networks: where next?

Deirdre Hughes, Chair of the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) Research Committee & Director of the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS), University of Derby and Neil Toyne, ICG Research Committee Member & Personal Adviser, Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland.

"Without an understanding of the impact of career guidance interventions, we cannot hope to improve them... without research we cannot hope to get such an understanding. Without evidence of the effectiveness of career guidance, we cannot hope to convince others to fund and support our services... Without research, we cannot hope to get such evidence" (Roberts, 2006).¹

The interim report on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, *Education and Training 2010: the Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms*,² identifies career guidance as one of four key actions to create open, attractive and accessible learning environments. It calls for the strengthening of the role, quality and co-ordination of career guidance services to support learning at all ages and in a range of settings, empowering citizens to manage their learning and work. Throughout the UK, a major challenge for advisers working with graduates and non-graduates is the extent to which they can articulate, with confidence, the impact and added-value benefits of their work.

Good evidence is hard to come by, when it comes to clearly demonstrating the impact of careers work (Hughes *et al*, 2002) and how this benefits individuals, communities and UK PLC.³ For example, there are research design problems such as:

- defining guidance;
- defining outcomes;
- isolating the effects of guidance;
- long-term effects; and
- bias in evaluation.

These aspects are often contested in differing settings depending on perceptions of what constitutes 'real evidence', i.e. making a difference. There are problems with the literature base underpinning careers work. There exists:

- inaccessible academic language within publications;
- a wealth of work not published; and
- a growing use of 'consultants'.

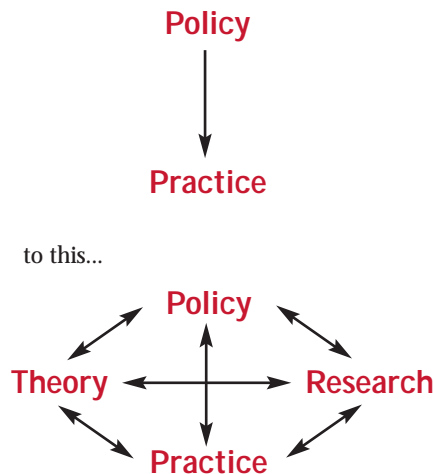
Research can be used to:

- stimulate critical thinking and new ideas;
- improve training and professional development;
- complement quality assurance;
- improve practice either 1-1 or in groups, at an institutional and/or service level;
- keep up to date with labour market changes; and
- inform/influence policymakers.

If successful, it should inspire and motivate others to **ask questions** and to

gather further evidence on what **works** and **what does not work** along with **the reasons why**:

From this...



From a practitioner research perspective, there are many options available as a useful starting point, i.e.

- Client groups - Investigating needs, expectations, characteristics, problems.
- Labour & education markets - Exploring opportunities, barriers, structures, changes.
- Techniques - Applying screening and assessment methods, counselling approaches etc.
- Contexts - Reviewing the effect of institutional settings.

Lessons learned from everyday practice must be set within the context of 'the real world' whereby effective guidance operates not through superhuman individual knowledge, but through knowledge networks. In June 2007, findings from an Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) online survey indicated strongly that members value research as a means of informing their practice.⁴ This has stimulated discussion on finding new and better ways of connecting guidance practitioners to dynamic knowledge networks operating at a distance, i.e. 'virtual' and/or through face-to-face meetings.

Use of new technologies which offer flexible ways of creating, gathering and disseminating knowledge through social bookmarking, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, online discussions and access to user-friendly research are making a significant contribution to building virtual communities of practice, e.g. the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) <http://guidance-research.org> and European Guidance and Counselling Research Forum www.guidance-europe.org/.

This, combined with facilitating face-to-face events attended by individuals from differing sectors, disciplines and/or associations, opens up further possibilities for 'knowledge creation' within a cross-sector approach.

The ICG is the UK's largest professional association supporting over 4,000 individuals working with adults and young people. It is developing a research culture in career education and guidance by:

- reviewing and promoting research findings from within and outside the UK;
- extending the work of the Institute's Research Committee to form a new ICG Practitioners' Research Forum;
- exploring collaborative links with other UK and overseas professional associations; and
- identifying employers committed to building 'knowledge networks' with career guidance professionals.

The ultimate goal is to 'develop effective mechanisms for ensuring that robust evidence is used to influence both practice and policy developments' (Davies *et al*, 2000).⁵ There are many challenges ahead that need new solutions and tactics to further improve careers provision for all UK citizens.

For further information on practice, policy, research and theory, visit:

- www.icg-uk.org
- www.derby.ac.uk/nlrg
- <http://guidance-research.org>
- www.guidance-europe.org/

Contacts

Deirdre Hughes, email: d.m.hughes@derby.ac.uk; Neil Toyne, email: neil.toyne@connexionslr.co.uk

Note: The National Guidance Research Forum and European Guidance Research Forum websites are led by Professor Jenny Bimrose, Principal Research Fellow, Institute for Employment Research, Warwick University and Visiting Professor of Careers Research and Practice, Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

References

1. Roberts, P. (2006) *Developing a Research Practitioner Network*. Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) National Conference, Glasgow. November 2006.
2. Communication from the Commission COM(2003) 685 final.
3. Hughes, D., Bosley, S., Bowes, L., and Bysshe, S. (2002) *The Economic Benefits of Guidance*. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.
4. Institute of Career Guidance (2007) *On-line Survey: Constructing the Future Publication*. ICG: Stourbridge.
5. Davies, H.T.O., Nutley, S., & Smith, P. (2000) *What Works? Evidence-based policy and practice in public services*. Bristol: The Policy Press 16. p.362.

'Jobshopping': Turning Chance to Choice

Helen Wakefield, Head of Windmills Learning and Development and Sharon Nicholson, Learning and Development Manager in the Windmills team, University of Liverpool

18

In collaboration with the Graduate Yorkshire Initiative (a partnership between the Yorkshire Universities) and Windmills from the University of Liverpool, delegates were introduced to the new resource: 'JobShopping'.

Aimed at individuals looking to find job opportunities via Job Shops/placements and eventually leading to their first substantive role, the resource helps provide practical activities in a STOP/THINK and GET SHOPPING structure.

The skills needed to find the right job are also those needed to shop for the right purchase. Individuals face lots of choices, they are bombarded with information and a wide range of competing options. The Jobshopping resource pinpoints ten things Jobshoppers need to know to make the right choices as they set about shopping for the job they really want.

Delegates were asked to put themselves in the shoes of the average jobshopper

and participate in activities originated from the ten sections of the Jobshopping guide. They were asked to consider:

1. Get Lucky – What are the lucky habits you need to adopt to improve your chances of getting the job you love?
2. Spot Your Skills – Which of the average 500 skills are the ones that really matter to you?
3. Find Your Style – What is your particular work style – what matters to you about the type of work you want to do?
4. Shopping for Your Future – Imagine leading the life you have always dreamed of – what are you doing?
5. Be Confident – How to increase your confidence to ensure you are not the one holding yourself back from shopping for the job you would really love.
6. Shop Smarter – Invest in a little research to make sure the job purchase you make is the right one.

7. Build Your Band – Identify who your supporting band is to help you shop for the right job.
8. Get Value for Money – How to make the most of those first few weeks in your new job; do you need to make any changes?
9. Build on Your Investment – How to keep the process going by reflecting on the job you are doing as you become more established.
10. Be Brave – Putting some excitement into your JobShopping and consider how you could be braver.

The session was lively, participative and fun for all. If you would like to find out more, or are interested in getting hold of copies of Jobshopping or wish to speak with us regarding how you may be able to use it with clients, please contact us at Windmills on 0151 794 8265 or windmillsonline.co.uk

Retail work experience

Charlie Ball, Labour Market Analyst, HECSU

Charlie Ball presented a workshop on the work experience project on the retail sector in the South East, funded by Skillsmart Retail and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) that was the subject of an earlier article in *Graduate Market Trends*.¹

Discussion centred on the insights into the barriers to work placement in the sector that were revealed by the methodology, and into the views expressed by the participants in the survey.

The research team experienced difficulty in gaining direct access to students, and compiling an interview sample proved the greatest challenge of the research project. The timing of the data collection (September/October 2006) also coincided with very busy periods in universities and further education colleges. Universities were more able to respond to research team requests for interviews than further education colleges.

Both further and higher education institutions are large organisations and

the difficulties the research team encountered are likely to be similar to those faced by employers wishing to offer work experience opportunities for students.

It also proved difficult to secure interviews with employers, for a range of reasons. Many declined to take part in the survey, citing a lack of time, or that they did not take part in work experience, or that they felt the research to be of no benefit to them. As in institutions, it was sometimes difficult to identify the most appropriate person to speak to about work experience - this seems to be true both for the research team and for staff within the employer organisations. Many employers made commitments to contribute to a telephone interview that they did not then fulfil.

These practical challenges are likely to be encountered by students or institutions wishing to engage with employers about work experience or other aspects of education-industry liaison.

The views expressed by participants were used to illustrate some of the prevailing attitudes within the sector, with a variety being shown and discussed.

The conclusion was that employers and institutions had work to do to overcome the barriers that exist and to sell the benefits of the retail sector in general, and work placement in retail in particular, to students. Some in both employers and institutions remained to be convinced of the value of work experience.

In all, the feeling was best summed up by this quote from the research:

"The retail sector is extremely good at marketing its products, and very poor at marketing itself"

The full report for the project is available at www.work-experience.org

Reference

1. 'Barriers to work placement in the retail sector in the South East', *Graduate Market Trends*, Spring 2007. www.prospects.ac.uk/links/CSDGMT

Keynote speakers session

The article presented here is a summary of a keynote address delivered by Allister McGowan at the HECSU/HEA conference.

The topic of another keynote speech, Futuretrack 2006, by Professor Kate Purcell, is covered in the article 'Embarking on higher education (II): Futuretrack 2006 – the bigger picture' on p.6 in this issue of Graduate Market Trends.

What Research Means to My Practice

Allister McGowan, Fellow and current Chair of the National Institute of Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC)

My initial disclaimer is that I can make little credible claim to be a 'researcher' (certainly not in a professional sense) and that it is a long time since I last worked as a career guidance practitioner!

That being said, my own career over 30 years in the careers field has embraced roles as a practitioner, as line manager and mentor of other practitioners, and as a senior manager and Chief Executive of careers companies. I have been a Council member and President of the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) and served as an External Examiner for Diploma in Careers Guidance courses. My current activities include chairing the Fellows of the National Institute of Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC). It is that experience that I want to draw on to share some reflections on the relationship between research and practice in our field.

The NICEC role is, I think, of particular pertinence because the Institute's avowed goal is to 'enhance practice in the fields of career development, education and guidance through research and the development of theory'. To that end, NICEC presents a reflection of the careers profession's relationship with research as its members undertake work that ranges from the clearly *academic* at one pole to the expressly *applied* at the other. It is worth observing at the outset that whilst there can be a temptation – at least for practitioners – to associate research too readily with academic perspectives, we do know that research is of vital importance in informing elements of front-line service delivery. A glaring example is the urgent need to improve our knowledge and understanding of labour markets and labour market opportunities. It seems to me that this is an area where we have gone backwards over the last few years and where that deficiency is likely to be

cruelly exposed by the combination of work-related curriculum development impacting upon the 14-19 age group and (we hope) the launch of an 'adult careers service' in the wake of the Leitch Report.

And yet we do know that – as in other fields of social welfare provision – there are barriers between the work of researchers and that of practitioners, and within the career guidance profession there is an ambivalence towards research and theory. On the one hand practitioners take pride in being part of a profession with sound theoretical and academic underpinning – in recent years that has been an important factor in preserving the self and professional esteem of too many careers advisers in England, who have felt undermined by some of the policies and priorities dictating their practice. On the other, there remains the scepticism that I recall encountering when involved as a member of the panel acting as a 'sounding board' for an Employment Department research project some 15 years ago. Jenny Kidd, John Killeen and others were examining the role of theory in the careers guidance interview. Responses from practitioners underlined the tendency to dismiss the value of 'theory' – in part, at least, because of an assumption that research should reveal 'unassailable truths' (and, by definition, was not of value if it failed to do so).

I do not believe, however, that career guidance professionals are complacent about their skills and practices or resistant to the need for continuous professional development. When the Institute of Careers Officers "metamorphosed" into the Institute of Career Guidance it was clear that there was an imperative for the Institute to establish a locus within the field of research and theory. The establishment of a Research Committee and the production of issues of

Constructing the Future enjoy widespread support throughout the Institute's membership.

There was a real enthusiasm too – from both researchers and practitioners – when Connexions was launched with 'evidence based practice' identified as one of the eight 'key principles' that would inform and drive delivery. Sadly, that commitment to evidence based practice seemed to disappear from the Connexions' landscape with remarkable speed and Connexions has moved on leaving no legacy of integrating research and theory with practice. That has been an opportunity wasted because we do need to feel our way towards a more sophisticated approach that equips practitioners, their organisations and indeed policy makers to use research constructively and effectively.

But there is a legacy from Connexions that is positive and is pertinent to enhancing the relationship between practice and research. It is the emphasis given within Connexions training courses (especially the Diploma for Personal Advisers) to reflective practice. That is not to say that reflective practice was absent from training provision prior to Connexions but it is to recognise that Connexions imparted a new dynamic and a raised profile. We may question the extent to which that emphasis has been carried through beyond initial training but that is to carp. Initial training in virtually all professions is better developed, provided, supported and resourced than ongoing professional development. Importantly we are, I believe, building a 'cultural professional framework' (not necessarily a structural framework) within which the *expectations* of practitioners will increasingly include the development of reflective skills in tandem with a commitment to continuous professional development. That, in turn, starts to create a significantly different context within which we can seek to open up that problematic relationship between research, theory and practice.

In broad terms, it seems to me that we can identify two models that bring research and practice together. The first most closely accords with what we might characterise as a traditional understanding of research (with a capital 'R'); that is knowledge is generated by perceived elites working, primarily, within academic disciplines and driven by the internal logic of their discipline. The relationship with practice here is one of telling practitioners what is 'safe', valuable and applicable and helping them to transform their practice accordingly.

The drawbacks inherent in that model become quickly apparent. It reinforces the notion that research will lead to revelations of 'unassailable truths', it is premised upon an unequal relationship between the researcher/teacher and practitioner/learner and its academic locus and emphasis erect barriers to the transmission of knowledge.

Helpfully, the educationalist, Peter Jarvis, has described this first model as **metatheory** – which he understands to mean information, in the sense that it is intended not to apply directly to practice but to inform it. An understanding that has the capacity to defuse the potential for tension in the practitioner/researcher relationship by placing that relationship upon a more equal footing.

And Jarvis counterposes metatheory with the second model – that of **personal theory**. It is personal theory that constitutes knowledge, and knowledge is created by the practitioners themselves, testing information through practice, reflecting upon its utility and ultimately integrating it into their thinking and practice or rejecting it. In essence, of course, I am describing action-based research or work-based problem-solving.

The model is not beyond criticism – it is, inevitably, subjective and consequently idiosyncratic. But it can be argued that career guidance practice is essentially

subjective and idiosyncratic even when undertaken by highly trained and experienced professionals (perhaps especially then!). Personal theory is, however, extremely responsive, flexible and adaptable – it changes constantly in response to the dynamics encountered by both practitioners and their clients. When personal theory is inadequate for a new situation, that is precisely when reflection is greatest and when knowledge changes. So we return to that notion of personal reflection as an important element within practitioner research.

Both of these models can contribute to our need, within the career guidance profession, to reassess our understanding of research and theory and its potential impact upon practice. We need to maximise the opportunities for improving and enhancing what we do whilst recognising that research will not have the impact of a blinding light. Advances are not of the road to Jerusalem variety, but small, incremental 'nudges' to current practice.

That being said, however, I believe that we may be approaching a critical, if not seminal, juncture that can have significant implications for the research-practice relationship within our profession.

The current arrangements for the initial training of career guidance practitioners – the 'unholy mix' of the QCG and NVQ Level 4 guidance that succeeded the Diploma in Careers Guidance – is widely regarded as 'barely fit for purpose'. Certainly, current developments – impacting upon provision for both young people and adults in different ways across the United Kingdom – make the existing arrangements unsustainable. In Scotland, initial training is already being reshaped and it seems to me that the establishment of a career guidance service for adults in England (even if not the precursor of an all-age guidance service) will bring with it

a need to train guidance professionals to deliver an all-age guidance strategy. I do not doubt that the necessary re-engineering of training will be a fraught and difficult process (bedevilled not least by defining the purpose of career guidance within different structural settings), but the logic of the emerging pattern(s) of provision argues for a complete and radical overhaul of initial training of career guidance practitioners that must, in time, also influence in-service development. That can represent a tremendous opportunity for the profession itself to advance a vision of excellence in that training. There is a promising new spirit of co-operation and shared purpose across the sector – ironically, perhaps, stimulated by the demise of the Guidance Council – that could find focus around the training agenda. That would be an opportunity for NICEC, HECSU, AGCAS, the ICG and others to reach a professional consensus around initial training and to put at its heart a commitment to the development of practitioner-researchers.

I have concentrated today on the relationship between research and theory and practice. I am aware that there is another key relationship – between research and policy – that exerts enormous influence upon our work. I do believe (I think we have to believe) that researchers, policy makers and practitioners can work together to achieve a greater understanding of careers work and its potentialities. Many of the points I have made about the problematic relationship between research and theory and practice apply in most professions – many of them of considerably greater maturity than our own. But my reflections upon my own experiences convince me that we have the commitment and motivation to create and exploit opportunities to develop a more positive, iterative relationship between research and practice and use that as a key tool in driving up the standards of professional practice.