

14-19 career guidance in England: an unbecoming profession?

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The project

- Much previous evidence that 14-19 career guidance is beneficial for young people's progression
- Evidence of reduced provision since move to Connexions: policy contradictions
- Little research about impact on the career guidance profession
- Giving a voice to practitioners
- What happens when a profession is 'uprooted'?
What is the impact on capacity and expertise?

Research aims

1. **To** map the current state of the career guidance profession in England and evaluate the impact upon it of 14-19 reforms.
2. To enhance understanding of continuity and change in the **roles, identities and practices of careers advisers** in the social and policy contexts of their lives and work.
3. **To** contribute to the development of theory about the effects of policy change on the dynamics of participation in professional communities of practice.
4. To inform policy and practice about infrastructural support and professional development needs to maximise the effectiveness of career guidance in the 14-19 sector.

Research design

- Funded by UK Economic & Social Research Council
- Fieldwork Feb-Dec 2008
- Initial survey of staffing levels, qualifications, CPD provision, turnover
- Case studies of 3 Connexions services in North of England, in each:
 - ‘career history’ interviews with 6 CG-trained PAs
 - interviews with 2 senior managers & 2 local stakeholders
 - time-use diaries over two different weeks by PAs
- Interviews with 9 ex-PAs who had quit Connexions
- Interviews with 6 national stakeholders

Samples

- Connexions services – willing to participate, different histories/ethos
- PAs – CG-trained volunteers, largely committed to staying
 - variety of training routes (DipCG, NVQ, QCG)
- Ex-PAs - volunteers via ICG and AGCAS appeal, snowball techniques
 - critical sampling: professional disagreement
- Three tranches of initial training (pre-`94, `94-`99, `00 on)
- Local stakeholders – post-16 provider + LA representative
- National stakeholders: ICG, DCSF, CG training centre, NACP, CBI

Perceptions of evolution

- 1973 on – careers service a 'Cinderella' in LEAs
- 1994 – externalisation of careers services – fragmented autonomy, heightened status
- 2001 – subsumption into Connexions – autonomy revoked – 'anti-careers ethos'
- 2008 – disaggregation and diffusion – funding returned to LAs – chaos and uncertainty
- 2008 on – shift back to 'careers' in national policy, but local policy-making can differ
- **Favourable advance within the field, then relegation to the margins**

Perceptions of Connexions

- Almost universal agreement with the principle of Connexions as a joined-up service for youth, 'one-stop shop'
- A very few supported both principle and practice of Connexions
- Large majority agreed with the principle, but disagreed strongly with its implementation
- All viewed it as targeted, *not* universal service – but targeted service *also* viewed as inadequate

Survey – overall staffing

- 37% response rate
- Connexions severely understaffed
- Service disruption and further loss of staff approaching April 2008
- Turnover in 2007 up to almost 11% in some services
- Difficulties in recruiting and retaining CG staff

Survey – CG capacity

- 66% of PAs reported to hold professional career guidance qualifications (PCGQs) **but... ?**
- May be over-reported
- **Confusion about what counts as a PCGQ – *generic* guidance or *specialist career* guidance?**
- No national and little local data about staffing and professional qualifications
- Existing data to be lost following TUPE transfers

What do CG-trained PAs do?

Continuity and change in functional roles

- Role divided between Education PAs and Community PAs in all 3 case study services
- 14 EPAs and 3 CPAs completed time-use diaries
- Results to be viewed within context of qualitative approach

Time use diaries

- Daily over two weeks (one summer term, one autumn term)
- Results collected daily by research team (validity, reliability)
- Recording nature of activity, duration, with whom, where
- Rating degree of CG involved (1-5) for each activity
- Rate degree of satisfaction (1-5) with each activity
- Triangulated/integrated with qualitative data
- Give us a picture of PAs' overt day-to-day practices **and** attitudes which inform them (cf. Gershuny & Sullivan, 1998)

Time use by activities

	EPAs	CPAs
Client interviews	35.8%	35.2%
Interview prep/follow-up	18.5%	21.9%
Groupwork	6.2%	0.7%
Liaison	14.0%	11.0%
Admin/email	7.4%	13.7%
CPD	6.0%	4.3%
Other CG	1.7%	0%
Travel	10.3%	13.2%

Time use

- Interview preparation and follow-up often perceived as bureaucratic, frustrating, limiting time with clients
- Liaison activities reported were mainly with:
 - key workers from other services
 - school staff
 - Connexions colleagues
- School liaison usually entailed 'triage' of client group, not development of careers education programme
- Very little liaison with employers or other opportunity providers
- PAs had little time for researching the opportunity structure

Time use

- Major reduction in careers education and groupwork activities
- Reduced possibility of in-depth career guidance in interviews
- Some PAs had caseloads including disabled clients
- No mention of any race or gender equality initiatives
- Increasing amounts of time spent on **tracking** yp, especially by CPAs
- **All PAs perceived that there is not enough time for caseload size, which is up to 3-4 times higher than originally planned**

Time use on career guidance

- EPAs: 39% of overall time strongly/wholly related to CG
- CPAs: 12% of overall time strongly/wholly related to CG

Just over half of PAs' time was spent on client interviews, preparation, follow-up:

- EPAs viewed 70% of time in client interviews as strongly/wholly related to CG
- CPAs viewed 28% of time in client interviews as strongly/wholly related to CG
- EPAs were more satisfied with the outcomes of CG-related activities, notably client interviews and CPD, than other activities
- There is no correlation between perceived degree of CG and satisfaction for CPAs
- Indications of professional values?

What do CG-trained PAs do?

Less overt but highly significant aspects of practice:

- Identity work
- Emotional labour
- Ethical labour
- Becoming, unbecoming and not-becoming

...all within a perceived context...

Context: contradictions and tensions

- Impossibly large caseloads – up to 800 for EPAs, 60-80 for CPAs
- Increasing demand for CG (especially re. 14-19 Diplomas), limited and reduced resources
- In client triage process, CG is not defined as a need
- Rising NEET numbers (recession, focus on NEET targets)
- Connexions viewed as 'universal' service in terms of provision for 'NEET' yp – other services may refuse to take referrals
- There could be confusion about whether PAs *deliver* or *broker* the of range services for young people

Context: contradictions and tensions

- Schools give non-impartial advice
- Some schools employ pastoral staff who may counteract the CG process
- Some schools' careers ed programs have collapsed
- Consistent relationships with young people are impossible
- Connexions' resources and tools are focused on tracking and surveillance vs. social support
- LAs may divert funding, reducing resources further
- **Pressure on targeted as well as 'universal' service**

Context: contradictions and tensions

BUT:

- These can be mitigated by management of service:
 - by clarity about PA role as *brokers*, not *deliverers* of all support
 - by focus on mission and values (young person-centred) rather than targets
 - by co-located multi-agency collaboration
 - by supportive supervision rather than managerialist supervision
 - by clear commitment to delivery of CG as core aspect of Connexions
 - by security of adequate funding

Identity work

“Roles (for example, to be a worker, a mother, a neighbor, a socialist militant, a union member, a basketball player, a churchgoer, and a smoker, at the same time) are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society ... Identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation. ... [Roles] become identities only when and if social actors internalize them, and construct meaning around this internalization.” (Castells, 2004: 6–7, cited in Cribb et al, 2008: 353)

Identity work

- Policy determination to invent a new profession of PAs
- Role supposed to include:
 - ‘holistic’ approach
 - long-term trusting relationships with young people
 - brokering of multiple services
- But lack of clarity (Watts, 1999)
- ... and an impossible fiction? (Colley, 2001)
- Focus on meeting targets vs. young peoples’ best interests
- Failure to acknowledge different professional histories, ethos, practices and potential resistance (Artaraz, 2006; Garrett, 2002; Smith, 2003)

Identity work

- CG-trained EPAs and ex-PAs resisted the designation of 'PA' strongly – 'I make sure people know I'm the careers lady'
- They perceived the PA role as 'jack of all trades and master of none'
- They resisted expectations of giving inexpert advice on (e.g.) sexual health
- They raised concerns about inexpert CG given by non-CG trained PAs
- CG-trained CPAs embraced the broader remit of Connexions and the notion of a wider role – though confusion remained
- Many worked continually at conveying their understanding of their role to other agencies and institutions

Identity and capacity

- Lave and Wenger (1991) on communities of practice
- From legitimate peripheral participation to full membership
- Becoming, belonging, being are crucial to learning and knowing

"[S]ocial communities are in part systems of relations among persons. The person is defined by as well as defines these relations. Learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities... identity, knowing and social membership entail one another..." (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.53)

Identity and capacity

Data reveal instances of:

- Established 'being' under erosion (gradual de-skilling) to different degrees – partial 'unbecoming'
- 'Not-becoming' – after CG initial training, one CPA sees role as 'social worker', though does not have SW training/registration
- Total 'unbecoming' – quitting CG altogether
- 'Becoming' – leaving Connexions for another CG sector
- Participation in a community populated and managed by CG-specialists is viewed as essential for on-going informal CPD
- ...but also viewed as under threat

Emotional labour

Defined as:

....the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*... [Emotional] labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others (Hochschild, 1983: 7, original emphases).

Emotional labour

- Retaining a 'professional' demeanour in the face of 'micro-aggressions' against one's professional status
- Containing frustration about increase of bureaucratic work
- Containing frustration about the size of caseloads, and disappointment about its effect on the quality of work
- Dealing with troubled young people, with little 'clinical' supervision
- Providing peer support for other PAs
- Managing stress and distress when lack of resources leave young people vulnerable – 'I hardly slept all weekend...'

Ethical labour

Cribb argues that marketisation of public services introduces 'ethical drift', encouraging ritualistic meeting of targets as well as sheer cheating and manipulation, thus posing ethical dilemmas.

"These dilemmas are chronic and serious because ... there is no simple translation between institutional obligations and ethical obligations, between 'doing my job' and 'doing the right thing'. Doing our job might involve doing things our employers demand of us which we find ethically distasteful and as [professionals] we need to continually make decisions about when to conscientiously object, when to comply and when to adopt a stance of 'principled infidelity'". (Cribb, 2005: 7-8)

Ethical labour

Dilemmas around:

- offering interviews universally to all Year 11 pupils
- giving career guidance when one's knowledge base is diminished
- deciding which yp to help when one cannot help them all (pistachio effect)
- social control vs. social support
 - placing yp in unsuitable EET in order to meet targets
 - not recording yp as NEET in order to meet targets
 - forging signatures of yp in order to meet targets

Ethical labour

Role construction (Cribb, 2005; Cribb, 2008):

- Idealised policy representation of long-term holistic nurturing
- Idealised professional commitment to person-centred practice
- Realised policy demand of short-intervention tracking and placement
- Irreconcilable tensions between these, impossible to orient to all, resulting in alienation
- Responses vary between conscientious objection, compliance and principled infidelity – individualised or collective
- The more overt, consistent and individual the resistance, the more likely leaving Connexions (voluntarily or otherwise) seems to be

Impact on professional capacity

- Identity work, emotional and ethical labour are all related to professional capacity
- On the one hand, doing this work draws on existing capacity
- Responses mostly rooted in theoretical and practical understandings of CG and its importance in helping yp
- ...and all rooted in a commitment to client-centred practice
- On the other hand, it can also result in the loss of capacity via demoralisation and stress
- All three contributed, often in combination, to PAs leaving (or being forced to leave) Connexions

Concerns about future

- No national co-ordination of Connexions or career guidance
- Funding for CG already much reduced
- No ring-fenced funding for Connexions *or* CG within LA Children's Trusts
- Lack of understanding about CG in LA leaderships
- Infrastructure inadequate to support professional practice in IYSS e.g. multi-professional teams with no specialist base
- Threats to impartiality of CG if devolvement goes to schools
- Lack of monitoring or enforcement of IAG Strategy and Standards

Postscript data

- Some LAs have downgraded PAs and reduced their salaries by £2k-5k p.a.
- One LA is proposing to merge Connexions with ESW service, with 40% staff redundancies, in 2010
- Will this produces further losses in the 14-19 CG profession?
- Will we see a tendency for greater concentration of the best CG-specialist staff in certain Connexions services?
- Will this result in a postcode lottery for young people?

Limitations of the research

- A snap-shot in a rapidly moving field
- Little reliable quantitative data, difficult to obtain
- Opportunity sample
- Confidentiality restricts data that can be reported
- Ethnographic observation would be very useful
- It would also be helpful to compare PAs from other backgrounds
- ...and a wider range of opportunity providers' views

Conclusions

- New IAG Strategy has been widely welcomed in the CG community – ‘careers’ is back
- Abandons notion of generic PA and acknowledges role of specialisms in youth support
- But does it address the problems in the field which are contributing to loss of capacity?
- In particular, does it address the contradictions in policy idealisations of the PA role and their realisation via targets?
- Does the end (any EET destination) justify the means (coercion or subversion)?

Recommendations?

- Evidence-based policy at national and local level
- Requirement on all providers of 14-19 CG to provide regular data on numbers of staff and their qualifications
- Clarity about which qualifications can underpin delivery of specialist CG, ensuring they are fit for purpose
- Recognition of pre-conditions for on-going workplace learning:
 - A national infrastructure focused on CG
 - Local infrastructures which enable regular contact between CG specialists and management support from CG specialists
- More resources on clinical rather than disciplinary supervision
- A public debate about the values and ethics of career guidance practice
- + + + ???

And finally...

...much of what is 'done' by professionals is done *by role construction* and is accomplished independently of, and so-to-speak 'before' individual professional agency kicks in. And, given that there is a *prima facie* reason to treat our occupational commitments with ethical seriousness, we cannot lightly dismiss the claims made upon us by changes in our roles, neither can we lightly dismiss all changes in workplace priorities, principles and cultures as ethical corrosion. We need an 'ethics of roles' – including an interest in discriminating between more or less ethically acceptable adaptations to, or extensions of, occupational roles. (Cribb, 2008)

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