

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY

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Abstract

The rationale for policy interest in career development services, and the way in which this rationale is being strengthened by the current transformations in work and career, are discussed. The potential roles of public policy in relation to career development services are explored, along with ways in which such services can influence the policy-making process. A range of policy issues related to making career development services available to all throughout life are identified: these include the nature of such services, where they are to be located, and who is to pay for them. It is argued that there is a need for stronger structures and processes to bring together career development practitioners with policy-makers and other stakeholder interests in order to address tasks of common concern, at both national and international levels.

Introduction

Hitherto, remarkably little attention has been paid to policy issues in the career development field. With rare exceptions (e.g. Pryor & Watts, 1991; Watts, 1996), there has been no tradition of policy studies in the professional literature. Little attention is paid to policy matters in the training of counsellors and other career development professionals.

Yet the availability of career development services, and their nature, are strongly dependent on public policy. Most such services are funded, directly or indirectly, by governments, whether at national, regional or local level. The nature of such funding imposes constraints on the kinds of services that are offered and to whom they are made available. If the career development profession is to extend and develop its services, its relationship with policy-makers is crucial.

Conversely, policy-makers who see career development services as a significant policy instrument need the support and understanding of practitioners in order to achieve their goals. If policy decisions are made without adequate consultation, they are unlikely to be implemented effectively.

Accordingly, stronger links are needed between policy-makers and practitioners. Policy-makers – who include both politicians and their civil-service advisers – need to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of career development work. Practitioners need to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which policy is developed and implemented. Both sides need to take responsibility for initiating and sustaining this dialogue.

In this paper I want to explore further the relationship between public policy and career development services. I will draw heavily on the discussions at an international symposium on "Career Development and Public Policy: International Collaboration for National Action" which was held in Ottawa in May 1999. The symposium was organised by the Canadian Career Development Foundation, in association with the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance. The 47 participants came from 14 countries. The design was that there would be four representatives from each country, including two policy advisers (i.e. senior civil servants) and two professional leaders, though some teams deviated a little from this norm. Each team took responsibility for producing a country paper which was distributed in advance and then discussed in plenary within the symposium. In addition, there were theme papers from a number of international experts, plus small-group sessions which addressed particular issues relating to each theme. The present paper is adapted from a report to be included in the symposium proceedings (Hiebert & Walz, in press'). It draws substantially from discussions at the event, and from the papers prepared for it (all of which will be included in revised form in the proceedings), but also represents a personal commentary on the matters discussed.

Rationale

The key rationale for policy interest in career development services is that they represent a public good as well as a private good. They are usually of value to the individuals to whom they are addressed. But they also yield benefits to the wider society.

Conventionally, these benefits have been divided into two main categories. The first is *economic* efficiency in the allocation and use of human resources. It is argued, for example, that career development services can support the individual decisions through which the labour market operates, can reduce some of its market failures, and can support reforms designed to improve its normal functioning (Killeen et al., 1992). It is also argued that such services are an important mechanism for linking learners to education and training programmes which meet their needs and inspire their motivations, so reducing drop-out and improving learning performance. Beyond this, it is argued that they link education and training systems to the labour market, so optimising the economic yield from governments' substantial investment in these systems. A major stimulus to the growth of school counselling in the USA was the USSR's launch of Sputnik I and the recognition this induced of the need to produce more outstanding scientists and technologists (Herr & Cramer, 1972). In the UK, a significant influence on policy was the link established by the Confederation of British Industry (1989) between career guidance and the "skills revolution" required to achieve international economic

competitiveness.

The second benefit is *social equity* in access to educational and vocational opportunities. Career development services can perform a valuable role in raising the aspirations of individuals experiencing disadvantage, whether as a result of gender, ethnicity, social-class background, or disabilities. They can make such individuals aware of opportunities, and support them in securing access to these opportunities. They can also reduce social exclusion, both by helping young people to avoid such exclusion, and by supporting those currently excluded to gain access to education/training and the labour market.

In addition, a case was argued at the Ottawa consultation for a third benefit, which is concerned with community and environmental *sustainability*. It was suggested, for example, that career development services should take into account the concept of "green guidance": creating awareness of the environmental impact of vocational choices, with their effects being measured not only by an economic yardstick but also by ethical accounting (see Plant, 1997). It was also suggested that, particularly in economies which are not wage economies, career development services should encourage individuals to relate their choices to the capacity and sustainability of communities.

Within democratic societies, the balance between these sought benefits will vary between different political parties. Right-wing parties tend to attach more weight to economic efficiency; left-wing parties to social equity; green parties to sustainability. Since policy represents, through the commitment of funding, an expression and clarification of public values and intentions (Considine, 1994), policies will reflect these differences. This inevitably means that there will be some destabilisation when governments change. On the other hand, the fact that career development services can be positioned in relation to a wide variety of political agendas should make it possible to maintain a fair degree of continuity if those involved in influencing policy are sufficiently adroit.

Maintaining such continuity is arguably easier if clear account is taken of the distinctive nature of career development services as policy instruments. This is that they work *through* individuals rather than *on* them. In this sense, they are "soft" rather than "hard" policy interventions. At their heart is the notion of the "active individual": that individuals should be encouraged to participate in determining their role within, and their contribution to, the society of which they are part. They thus link individual needs to societal needs on a voluntaristic basis. In framing the way in which individuals are encouraged to address societal needs, the balance between economic efficiency, societal equity and community/ environmental sustainability can vary. But if in the end the needs and wishes of individuals are given primacy, this provides a base for maintaining the

continuity of such services.

The primacy of the individual's interests is commonly a core principle in codes of practice for career development services. There are practical as well as ethical reasons for this, not the least of which is that such services can only serve the public good if they retain the confidence and trust of the individuals with whom they are working. This implies a self-denying ordinance on the part of policy-makers, who may justify public support for the services on the grounds that they serve public purposes, but ultimately have to abnegate these purposes as the operating principle on which the practices of the service should be based. It is, in principle, a classic case of Adam Smith's (1776) famous dictum that individuals encouraged to pursue their own interests are led by an "invisible hand" to promote an end which is no part of their intention – the public interest – and to do so more effectually than when they intend to promote it. Career guidance services represent, perhaps, Smith's "invisible hand" made flesh.

This presents a problem in relation to the policy significance likely to be attached to career development provision. Policy-makers in the past have tended to be interested in *structural* solutions to problems. Within this mind-set, career development services tend to be viewed not as a direct *instrument* of policy, but more as a *lubricant* of such structural solutions. This may explain why they may be "invisible" in the eyes of some decision-makers. This subordinate "lubricant" role is however important, and needs to be recognised as such.

In addition, though, there is increasing questioning of the conventional way in which policy seeks to answer problems solely through structures and systems, in the form of government interventions administered by government bureaucracies. Instead, governments are increasingly seeking to operate through enabling *processes*: working with, and seeking to influence, the enterprise and energies of many other people and organisations. The concern is to ensure that public interests are met, where possible, through private actions, but influencing these actions so that they collectively meet the long-term interests of all, rather than the short-term interests of the few (see e.g. Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Career development services would seem to fit well into this changed mind-set. It potentially accords such services much greater significance in their own right.

Transformations in work and career

The argument for policy-makers to pay more attention to career development services as "soft" policy interventions is linked to the transformations that are currently taking place in work and career. There seemed at the consultation to be a strong consensus that the broad trend towards more flexible, self-managed careers is common to most

advanced economies. It means that the dominant model of career is no longer progression up an ordered hierarchy within an organisation or occupation: rather it describes the individual's lifelong development in learning and in work. This model is in principle open to all. It means that career development services are now concerned to help individuals not to choose careers but to construct them. Individuals now have to develop their own work identity as part of a reflexive process connecting personal and social change (Giddens, 1994).

These transformations have massive implications for individuals, for employers, for communities, and for public policy. Welfare systems, financial-security systems (including pensions and mortgages) and education and training systems have all been built around the industrial model of career, based on secure male employment and standardised life-cycles. All now need to be significantly re-cast (Bayliss, 1998a; Watts, in press).

A major aspect of this re-casting is reviewing the role of career development services. Many individuals will need and want support at strategic points in managing their career development, which includes sustaining their employability through lifelong learning. Such support needs to be available to all, as and when required, throughout life. A substantial expansion of this support is needed, along with innovation in developing new forms of support (including exploiting the role of information and communication technologies). This is now a high-priority issue for public policy.

Policy roles

The potential roles of public policy in relation to career development services fall into four categories: legislation, remuneration, exhortation, and regulation.

The role played by *legislation* varies between countries. In some countries, specific legislation is the essential precondition for action; in others, legislation plays a more limited role. In the former case, the existence of legislation does not necessarily mandate action: in Argentina, for example, a law in which all the main aspects of career guidance were considered was not promoted for lack of funds. Legislation relating to career development services is often concerned with a particular sub-set of such services, and commonly integrates such consideration with broader aspects of education/training or employment policy. Denmark appears to be the only country with specific legislation covering all career guidance activities, regardless of institutional setting.

The *remuneration* role may take a variety of forms. Some funding is provided *directly* from government to services; other is provided *indirectly* – as, for example, where educational institutions are funded by government and are encouraged to devote some of this

funding to the provision of career development services. Such *systemic* funding needs to be distinguished from *initiative* funding, which is usually provided on a short-term basis, seeking to encourage innovation and change.

Whatever its funding role, governments may seek to influence the nature of career development provision through *exhortation*. Such influence can be exerted in a number of ways, ranging from ministers' speeches to formal guidelines.

It may include creating principled visions which command imagination and effort, and facilitating collaboration and partnership to implement such visions. Relatively small sums of initiative funding can often act as powerful incentives in this respect.

In some cases, governments may seek to intervene more strongly, through *regulation*. This is particularly likely where government is directly responsible for funding and can exert financial sanctions for non-compliance. Government may also, however, seek to regulate services funded indirectly – through inspection procedures, for instance. It can further in principle seek to regulate services provided on a market basis, by requiring licenses to offer such services. Alternatively, it may be willing to delegate responsibility for such regulation to the career development sector itself.

The balance between these roles is likely to vary considerably between countries. There are also differences in the relative extent to which the roles are influential at national, regional or local levels. In several large countries -- Australia, Canada and the USA, for example – national governments have limited powers in relation to the field of education, where many career development services are located: policies at state/provincial level tend therefore to be more significant. There is also a strong case for arguing that if coherent career development provision is to be developed on a lifelong basis, there need to be strategies at local level for bringing partners together and co-ordinating their efforts (Watts et al., 1997).

At the same time, there is a need to look at the role of international policies. The European Commission, for example, has had a significant impact on career development programmes in some countries, including Ireland. There is a particularly strong case for developing international policies in relation to provision which crosses national boundaries – the quality of Internet websites, for instance.

One of the major difficulties with policy in the career development field is that it tends to cross administrative boundaries. In particular, it cross-cuts education policy, which tends to operate within a social tradition, and labour-market policy, which tends to operate within an economic tradition. Where these two areas are closely harmonised, policy related to career development is likely to be given more significant attention and to take a more coherent form. Where however they are clearly separated, such policy is likely either to be marginalised or to be incorporated in separate ways within the two distinct traditions.

This can affect career development provision, which tends then to become strongly segmented within the different sectors in which it operates.

An important question is whether it is better for policy to relate specifically to career development services per se, or to address them within wider educational, social and labour-market policies. Certainly where such services have a clearly important role to play in relation to structural reforms – for example, the Danish job-and-training rotation scheme, in which unemployed individuals are placed temporarily in jobs whose incumbents are released for training – this can add significant "clout". On the other hand, such policies tend again to segment provision. It may be that supports for individual career development will in future be accorded sufficient importance to merit policy consideration in their own right.

Influencing the policy-making process

If career development services are to be given stronger recognition by policy-makers, more attention needs to be given by the career development sector to ways of influencing the policy-making process. As part of this, more evidence is needed on the economic and social benefits of such services: these might include cost-benefit analyses covering, for instance, impact on unemployment costs and on non-completion rates in post-compulsory education and training. Such evidence needs also to be marshalled and presented in ways which make it readily accessible to policy-makers.'

Relying solely on this kind of evidence is, however, inadequate. It assumes that policy-making is a rational process, whereas in practice – as emphasised by policy-makers at the consultation – it is "messy and dirty", strongly influenced by balancing the interests of different lobbies, and "a lot happens by accident". Certainly the evidence needs to be there, because otherwise its absence will be used by opponents to undermine the case. It is necessary, but not sufficient.

Attention needs to be paid in particular to harnessing the support of interest groups. In Ireland in the 1980s, when a political decision was made to reduce funding for guidance services in schools, a concerted effort was targeted on parents to highlight the value of guidance to their children. In the USA, major changes in higher education have taken place as a result of self-interest advocacy expressed by students. In the UK, the support for careers education and guidance programmes provided by the Confederation of British Industry (1989) has been influential; trade unions, too, are becoming more interested in advocacy for career guidance services (Ford & Watts, 1997). The career guidance profession is likely to be more effective in the policy-making process if it can activate the interest and "voice" of these and other "stakeholder" groups. If it relies solely on its own advocacy, this can too easily be dismissed as

representing provider self-interest.

In more concrete terms, four pieces of advice were offered by policy-makers to career development professionals in the course of the consultation. One was "don't underestimate the press": politicians and their advisers regularly scan the newspapers, and it is important that they see evidence there of public interest in career development issues. The second was "the phone has to ring": there needs to be active pressure, preferably from individuals with some political influence. The third was "recognise the importance of personal experience": policy-makers are often strongly influenced by their own experience of career development services, or those of their children. The fourth was "provide the sound-bytes": career development professionals need to translate their complex professional concepts into language that policy-makers can absorb and use, without distorting the underlying message. Finally, it was noted that counsellors, with their strong listening and communication skills, ought to be well-equipped to be effective lobbyists in support of their work. They need to overcome their understandable and worthy, but misguided, ethical reluctance to using their skills for political as well as helping purposes.

Policy issues

If career development services are to be available to all throughout life, careful consideration is needed to the nature of such services, where they are to be located, and who is to pay for them. Some services are likely to be education-based; some employment-based; and some community-based. Some will be in the public sector; some in the voluntary sector; and some in the private sector. Some will be professional career guidance services; some will be part of wider provision; some will be self-managed; and some will be informal in nature. The balance and relationship between these various forms of career development support are likely to vary between countries.

It seems clear, however, that the traditional model of publicly-funded professional services based within formal bureaucratic systems is not likely to be a sufficient model for the future. In Germany, the monopoly of career guidance services previously held by the Federal Labour Exchange Office has now been broken, and new private and voluntary agencies are beginning to emerge, applying different approaches. In France, innovative work with young people at risk has been entrusted not to the highly-qualified guidance professionals within the education system but to staff with limited training, who paradoxically have much more demanding tasks to perform. There is a risk that if formal systems are unable to adapt to the new challenges posed by flexible labour markets and the like, they will increasingly be marginalised. On the other hand, if the resources and expertise available within these systems can be applied in more flexible

ways within more diversified models of delivery, they could have a strong continuing contribution to make to the quality of such delivery across the board.

The need for more diversified delivery models is evident in many countries. More account needs to be taken of where individuals actually go for help in relation to their career development – the role of public libraries, for example. Programmes designed to provide access to career development services for disadvantaged communities are often most successful where they are located in community centres within the neighbourhood and include active outreach strategies and the use of "barefoot counsellors" (see e.g. Jackson & Haughton, 1998). Such strategies should not however be viewed as negating the need for clear professional standards. To cover the wide range of provision they should encompass, these standards need to be broad and flexible in nature, with some recognition of hierarchy (distinguishing basic standards from more advanced standards) but with at least as strong attention to diversity (acknowledging the appropriateness of different standards for different levels of delivery and for different settings).

An important issue for governments is what career development services they should seek to provide themselves, and what their role should be in relation to services provided by others. Some governments are seeking to establish a distinction between *information* and *guidance* in these respects. In New Zealand, for example, current policy is based on government ownership and provision of career information, but the establishment of a contestable market for career guidance. In the UK, the priority for public funding of adult guidance is the provision of a basic information and advice service; other services may need to be offered on a fee-paying basis.

In relation to schools, three countries — the Netherlands, New Zealand and the UK — have adopted broadly similar approaches which have involved mandating career education within the curriculum through legislation, and then adopting different kinds of quasi-market mechanisms in relation to schools' use of external guidance services. In the Netherlands, this has included making funding available for schools to spend, initially with external services, but from 2000 as they wish. In New Zealand, it has involved some centrally-funded services from Careers Services (a government agency) but also school-managed funding for additional services which can be purchased on a contestable basis from Careers Services or from private providers. In the UK, support is provided through central government contracts with local careers services which are now separate legal entities. It would be useful to conduct a transnational study of the relative effectiveness of such quasi-market approaches, in comparison with alternative models.

Within education and training, career development services tend to be free to the end-user, or incorporated in fees for the learning programme as a whole. For other

adults, however, there are issues about who should pay for such services. In most countries, governments have been reluctant to commit themselves to making career development services freely available to all individuals, on the grounds that this would involve writing an open cheque. Where services have been made available, they have tended to be targeted on particular groups — notably the unemployed — or to be given minimal publicity in order to restrict demand. If however policy-makers decide that it is in the public interest for individuals to use career development services, they will want to find means of expanding such services without substantial budget increases. This opens up the question of whether such services should be paid for, at least in part, by individuals and/or employers. In France, all employees are entitled to a "skills review" funded by their employer: the take-up has however been low, because employees fear that seeking such a review may be interpreted by their employer as a sign of potential disloyalty. In the UK and USA, it seems that individuals are prepared to pay for career counselling, but in general only at levels which cover marginal costs rather than full costs: this does not enable a market to develop in which demand leads to expansion of supply. The advent in the UK of "individual learning accounts", as a mechanism for co-investment in learning (including guidance) between individuals, employers and the state, could provide a way of breaking out of this marginal-costs barrier to expansion, enabling the guidance to be paid for on a full-cost basis by getting employers and the state to supplement what individuals are prepared to pay (Watts, 1999).

If career development services are to be actively promoted to adults, much more attention is needed to ways of marketing these services. Evidence from recent market research in the UK suggests that many adults have little understanding of what guidance services can offer to them, and not infrequently have negative perceptions of such services based on bad memories of what was offered to them at school (Wilson & Jackson, 1998). Professional jargon can be an impediment here: simple descriptions are needed of career development that will be understood by consumers and by policy-makers alike. More market research is needed on consumers' perceptions and needs, along with clearer "branding" of career development services to signpost their existence and to enable customers to know what to expect from them. Such steps to unlock the latent demand for career development services are likely also to have an impact on policy-makers, who tend to be responsive to public interest and pressure. The move from a provider-driven to a consumer-driven culture is likely to have an impact on the nature of career development delivery. It will however continue to need to be supported by proactive strategies designed to make such services available to poor and disadvantaged communities.

It is important that career development services be available on a lifelong basis, including

provision for the "third age". The role of schools needs to be recast in relation to this model. Career education programmes in schools should lay the foundations for lifelong career development. The career management skills developed by such programmes should include how to access and utilise support from career development services in the future. There is concern in several countries that too much career education provision in schools at present is of poor quality, delivered by teachers who are inadequately trained for such work, and with inadequate support in the form of quality standards, inspection mechanisms and performance measures. Such provision too often leads to negative impressions of career development services which dissuade adults from using them. Improvements in its quality are crucial if lifelong career development is now to receive the attention it needs. In due course, more radical changes are likely to be needed in the structure and nature of schools in responses to the transformations in the world of work and related social changes (Bayliss, 1998b).

A final important issue relating to the future of career development services is the role of information and communication technologies. Here too there is widespread concern about the quality of some of the services available, about the risk that ICT disadvantages those who do not have the opportunity or the skills to access these services, and about the danger that policy-makers will regard the availability of websites and computerised systems as a reason for reducing investment in services that offer direct interaction with trained professionals. Nonetheless, it is clear that ICT offers major opportunities for redesigning career development services, and improving their quality and accessibility. It is also likely to open up the market in relation to such services, as it has done in such fields as banking. The career development sector needs to work with the flow of its potential, seeking to channel it rather than resist it.

Structures and processes

If these and related issues are to be addressed, structures and processes are needed which will regularly bring together career development practitioners (from all relevant sectors) with policy-makers and with other stakeholder interests (employers, unions, education and training organisations, community organisations, consumer groups) to address tasks of common concern. These tasks include: developing a common language and understanding; strategic planning; developing and implementing quality standards and accountability/ performance measures, both for practitioner competence and for organisational delivery; fostering partnership and coherence; promoting public understanding of the nature and significance of career development programmes and services; and ensuring that all career development provision is addressed to meeting the needs of individuals.

The nature of these structures and processes will vary between countries. Already, however, there are a number of exemplars. In Denmark, the National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE) brings together national education and training authorities, the social partners, women's organisations and career counsellors' professional associations, with a statutory responsibility for co-ordinating the field of career guidance. In the UK, the independent National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance brings together the guidance professional associations and key stakeholder groups, with government observers. In Canada, a series of leadership forums convened by the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation agreed that a "leadership council" was needed to build bridges between career development practitioners and those involved in public policy.

Elsewhere, organisations with narrower briefs have been able to play valuable co-ordinating roles. In Ireland, the National Centre for Guidance in Education was set up by the government to improve guidance provision in education, and has provided a focal point for innovation in the field. In the Netherlands, the National Centre for Career Issues (LDC) was set up by the government to provide support to and promote innovation in guidance services in all sectors. In the USA, the National Occupational Information Co-ordinating Committee (NOICC) and the State Occupational Information Co-ordinating Committees (SOICCs) were established to co-ordinate the delivery of career and labour-market information, but have developed wider roles: these have included developing National Career Development Guidelines identifying the career development competencies to be achieved at all education levels. Government funding for NOICC is now coming to an end, leaving a vacuum which will need to be filled if such co-ordinating work is to be sustained and developed.

The need for such co-ordinating bodies is also evident in several countries where they do not currently exist. In addition, since the issue of career development is now of global significance, and is linked to global movement of people and resources, stronger structures and processes are needed at international level. This will make it possible to share experience and good practice relating to policy, innovation, research and career development practice: the adaptation of the US National Career Development Guidelines in Canada and Japan provides an existing example of what can be achieved. It will also make it possible to harness the support of international organisations like the European Commission, OECD and UNESCO, and to support equality of opportunity across nations. The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) potentially provides a valuable focus for such development, but its work needs to be extended to develop a stronger policy dimension, with enhanced links with policy-makers at national and international levels.

The Ottawa consultation has been a promising first step to developing the structures and processes that are required. The plan is to follow it up with a variety of joint initiatives, and to review these at a follow-up event, involving a wider range of countries, to be held alongside the IAEVG conference in Vancouver in March 2001. In the meantime, the Canadian Career Development Foundation is taking responsibility for co-ordinating and supporting the action points agreed in Ottawa. If the momentum of these developments can be maintained, then the Ottawa event may prove to be a significant breakthrough in linking career guidance services much more closely and effectively with public policy.

Notes

1. Examples in the United Kingdom include the "Briefings" published by the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling on *Economic Benefits of Careers Guidance*, *Social Benefits of Career Guidance* and *Careers Work and School Effectiveness*. These are available free of charge from NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX, England.

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