Working class students and the career decision-making process:

a qualitative study

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Edge Hill University,

January 2008

HECSU

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Contents

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who have supported this research. In particular, we would like to thank the Higher Education Careers Service (HECSU) for sponsoring this study. Without the students this research would not have been possible. We would therefore also like to extend a special thank-you to all the students at Edge Hill University who agreed to participate in this study.

Executive summary

Rationale and focus of the study

The evidence suggests that working class students are disadvantaged in the graduate labour market because they lack the economic, social and cultural capital possessed by their middle class peers. This research investigated how this influences the way they approach career decision-making and whether it contributes to their disadvantage in the graduate labour market. The study examined how working class undergraduates in their final year of study at Edge Hill University make decisions about their careers. In particular, the study focused on the rationale behind the approach they adopted.

Methodology

This research involved two stages. First, students from a range of different types of degree were asked to complete a questionnaire. This provided information about the student's characteristics in terms of age, gender, degree studied and their social class. It also asked about the extent to which students used the careers service at Edge Hill. The second stage of the research involved 30 in-depth interviews with working class students about how they made career decisions. These interviews were taped and later transcribed.

Findings

The results of the study were analysed under three main headings: financial issues, networks and values.

Financial issues

It is claimed that a lack of economic capital forces working class students to engage in term-time work. This means they do not have the time to participate in non-paid extra-curricular activities that would help them to improve their employability. It is also argued that working class students lack the time to engage in career decision-making activities or to apply for jobs.

In this study, however, financial factors did not appear to be the key factor influencing behaviour. The students failed to participate in non-paid extra-curricular activities because they were unaware that graduate employers valued this type of experience. Furthermore, the students concentrated on achieving a 'good degree' to the exclusion of other activities because they believed this was pivotal to success in the graduate labour market.

The students also tended to adopt a 'serial approach' to study and careers. Therefore, rather than carrying out a number of tasks simultaneously, the students prioritised assignments and other activities and completed them serially, i.e. one at a time. As a result, career planning activities were inevitably suspended as the students completed more pressing tasks such as assignments. The fact that many students had term-time jobs also acted as a disincentive to action because it meant that most students had an income on graduation. Moreover, because many of their peers were adopting similar strategies they regarded their approach to careers as normative.

A lack of economic capital is also said to act as a constraint on the extent to which working class students are geographically mobile. Again, however, the students' lack of geographical mobility did not seem to arise because of financial constraints. The students often emphasised a psychological need to remain close to their family and friends. There was also evidence to suggest that some families exert emotional pressure on students to remain close to home.

Networks
Students operate within a complex set of relationships made up of parents, relatives, friends and professionals (i.e. teachers, lecturers and careers advisers). These relationships or 'networks' represent forms of social capital that may be utilised in the career decision-making process. It is argued that working class students will have poor levels of social capital because of the habitus that they and their 'contacts' occupy. This was generally true of the students in this study. Yet ambiguities arose because some students had family and friends from more middle class backgrounds. The students also discussed careers issues

with teachers, lecturers, and to a lesser extent, careers advisers. Some of these people (particularly teachers and older siblings) became role models for the students.

The reluctance of students to approach the careers service for advice arises for a number of reasons. These include the following:

- They preferred to talk to people they were more familiar with. This is why they often approached their lecturers rather than professional careers advisers.
- Some students said they were intimidated by careers advisers. They feared their lack of knowledge about careers issues could result in embarrassment or even humiliation.
- A minority of students had already decided on a career path. They did not, therefore, feel the need for careers advice. These students mistakenly believed that careers advisers were only there to help with career choices; they were not aware that they could also help them with the recruitment and selection process.
- Many students did not approach careers advisers because they were concentrating on their studies and were not at the stage of seriously considering careers.
- The careers service seemed to be invisible to some students. They were not conscious of its existence; and those who were aware of it did not always seem to know where the careers service was located.
- Some students were alienated from careers by their previous experience of the service, especially at school and college.
- A number of students admitted to lacking the motivation to arrange a careers interview.

Values

The working class are said to value informal ('hot') information, rather than formal ('cold') information and more rational (or comprehensive) approaches to decision-making. There appears, in this study, to be support for this view because the students often failed to adopt a rational approach to career decision-making. This occurred because a rational approach is time consuming and the students were focused on their academic studies. The students also exhibited a preference for 'hot' information, particularly their own direct experience and the experiences of people they know. The use of such limited sources of

7

information appears to be a factor contributing to the students' lack of understanding about issues relating to graduate employment.

It is also suggested that working class students lack a future orientation and have a fatalistic (and pessimistic) attitude to life. Whilst the students in this study were not pessimistic, they did appear to lack a future orientation. However, this was because their lack of knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market, and the fact that the vast majority had no clear career aspirations, gives the *impression* that they lack a future orientation. In practice, the students were concerned about the future: they just did not know what they wanted to do - or if they did - how they should prepare for their future careers.

The working class are also said to lack ambition and have low aspiration levels. Indeed, widening participation policy often focuses on raising the aspiration levels of those from lower socio-economic groups. Yet the students in this study had realistic rather than low aspirations. On the other hand, there were no students with very high aspirations and there was a small minority of students who lacked the confidence to even apply for graduate jobs.

Conclusion

The working class students in this study often exhibited values or behaviour that contradicted existing empirical research and theory. There was also a significant degree of heterogeneity in the decision-making behaviour of the students in this research. This is perhaps not surprising, because although the students all come from working class backgrounds, the influences upon them can often be very different.

Despite these differences some common themes emerged from this research:

- The students made little attempt to improve their employability. This was due to a lack of awareness of the importance of developing their 'personal capital'.
- The students did not consider a wide range of different careers options. This was because they did not adopt a comprehensive approach to career decision-making and they often had limited social capital.

- In spite of having poor levels of social capital the working class students in this study did not offset this disadvantage by making greater use of professional careers advice.

Recommendations

It would appear from this study that working class students need to be better informed about how to approach career decision-making. Solutions that advocate better information are, however, overly simplistic. It is recommended that the following is taken into account when attempting to improve the students' career decision-making:

- Due to the practical difficulties involved in targeting working class students for additional support we would suggest that compulsory careers education is introduced on all undergraduate programmes. We would expect working class students (and other disadvantaged groups) to obtain more benefit from this than other students.
- Careers advice and education should be student centred so that account is taken of the circumstances and values of the students.
- However, a critical approach should be adopted. The use of group work, practical exercises, case studies and 'analogical encoding' would help students to critically evaluate how they undertake the process of career decision-making and encourage them to consider alternative approaches.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

A desire to widen participation in higher education (HE) has remained a key policy objective of the Labour Government since its election in 1997 (see Greenbank, 2006a for a review). The focus of government and HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) policy has been on increasing the participation rates of students from lower socio-economic groups (SEGs) (Blanden and Machin, 2004).[1] This is because individuals from lower SEGs - who can broadly be referred to as the 'working class' (Layer, 2005) - are much less likely to attend university. For example, HEFCE (2003b) points out that whilst 40 per cent of the UK population are in the lower SEG category only 25 per cent of young entrants into HE come from this section of the population.

In recent years the government has turned its attention to the difficulties working class (and other non-traditional) students face once they are in HE. As such, HEFCE has directed funding not just at recruitment but to student retention (HEFCE, 2003c); they have also highlighted the need to support students as they make the transition from HE to employment (HEFCE, 2003a). The increased attention given to the transition from university to employment has arisen because the evidence suggests that students from working class backgrounds are disadvantaged in the labour market (see for example Marshall *et al.*, 1997; Evans, 2002; Purcell *et al.*, 2002; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005). As Brennan and Shah (2003) state, 'The well known lack of social

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[1] These groups include the unskilled (SEG V); the partly skilled (SEG IV); and skilled manual occupations (SEG IIIM). More recently the following classification has been used to define lower SEGs: routine (SEG 7); semi-routine (SEG 6); lower supervisory and technical (SEG 5); and small employer and own account workers (SEG 4). See ONS (2005); Kelly and Cook (2007); HEFCE (2007).

equity at the point of admission to higher education is matched by a further lack of equity at the point of exit from higher education' (p. 39). Similarly, Purcell *et al.* (2002, p. 1) argue:

> There is also evidence that graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds - the very candidates whom policy-makers have been most concerned to attract into higher education – benefit somewhat less than their middle-class peers from achievement of a degree. Recent surveys have indicated that they earn less, on average, than similarly qualified labour market entrants from 'traditional' graduate backgrounds and tend to evaluate their current employment and career development less positively.

Working class disadvantage appears to be rooted in their inferior educational achievement prior to entering university. On average working class children perform relatively poorly at both GCSE and A-levels compared to their middle class peers (see DfEE, 2000; Hutchings and Archer, 2001; UUK, 2003; Gorard and Smith, 2007). This means that if they enter HE (and the majority do not) they are more likely to attend less prestigious universities where entry requirements are lower (HEFCE, 2004; Greenbank, 2006b). Moreover, even if the working class have the qualifications to go to a more prestigious institution they may 'choose' to attend their local (less prestigious) higher education institution (HEI) in order to reduce the cost of their education (Smith, 2000; Forsyth and Furlong, 2000; Reay *et al*., 2001). This is important because the status of the university a student attends remains a significant factor in subsequent labour market success (Brown, 1997; Pitcher and Purcell, 1998; Hesketh, 2000; Purcell *et al*., 2002; Brown, 2003; Keep, 2004; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Christie *et al*., 2006).

There is also evidence to suggest that working class students lack the social and cultural capital to help them secure high quality jobs in the graduate labour market (Savage and Egerton, 1997; Pitcher and Purcell, 1998; Purcell *et al*., 2002; Brown *et al*., 2002; Brown, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004). For example, Brown *et al*. (2002) discuss how students from working class backgrounds might fail to obtain graduate jobs because they have the wrong accent and dress and behave in a way that is felt to be inappropriate by

organisations. It is argued that employers tend to recruit people who are 'like themselves' and who are therefore perceived to be able to successfully integrate into their organisation (Brown and Hesketh, 2004).

RATIONALE AND FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

Concerns about the disadvantage working class students face when they enter the graduate labour market, combined with the Labour Government's continued commitment to widening participation, provided the underlying rationale for conducting this research. The study examines how working class undergraduates, in their final year of study, prepare for entry into the graduate labour market. It also examines how they make decisions about their careers and what their plans for the future are. In particular, the study focuses on the rationale behind the approach the students adopt and the extent to which this may contribute to their disadvantage in the graduate labour market.

The culture of western society, which is reflected in the pedagogic approach adopted in the educational system, idealizes rationality in decision-making (Smith *et al.*, 1988). Rational approaches typically entail setting objectives, collecting information, and then generating and evaluating different alternatives before making a choice (see for example Cooke and Slack, 1991; Brunsson, 2002; Bazerman, 2006). This approach provides the rationale that underpins policy and the practice relating to careers education and advice (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). It is based on the idea that individuals can take control over their future and maximise their 'utility' by engaging in 'strategic life planning' (see Giddens, 1991). As Hodkinson (1998) contends a rational approach to career decision-making is often advocated as a means of maximising career opportunities. This is exemplified in Law and Watts' 'DOTS analysis' which promotes a systematic and comprehensive approach to career choice and preparation (see Law and Watts, 2003).

It could be argued that undergraduates, who have been inculcated into rational approaches through the educational system, will be likely to adopt a rational approach to career

decision-making. This study will examine the extent to which this is the case. In particular, it will focus on how the economic capital (i.e. material wealth), social capital (i.e. connections and networks) and cultural capital (i.e. values and dispositions) possessed by working class students influences their career decision-making behaviour (see Bourdieu, 1979, 1997, 1998).

Bourdieu emphasises that behaviour 'is embedded in processes of which we are never wholly conscious' (Gorton, 2000, p. 281-2). He argues that a person's 'habitus' (or class environment) is 'internalized and converted into dispositions that generate meaningful practices and meaning-given perceptions' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 170). This means a person's values are 'socially conferred' (Moore, 2004, p. 447) and arise from their class environment (Kenway and McLeod, 2004, p. 532). According to Bourdieu the working class are disadvantaged by their lack of material wealth and the fact that they unlikely to have connections with people of knowledge or influence. Bourdieu also argues that the type of cultural capital possessed by the working class is not recognised as having worth (i.e. 'symbolic value) by certain parts (or 'fields') within society (Bourdeu, 1979). Therefore, only particular forms of cultural capital (usually that possessed by the middle classes) will have value in the graduate labour market.

STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

In Chapter 2 the methodological approach adopted for this study is discussed. The concepts of capital (economic, social and cultural) and habitus are then used to provide a framework for this study. This research study will, therefore, analyse how financial issues influence the students' career planning and decision-making (Chapter 3). It will then examine how their social networks are used in the career decision-making process (Chapter 4). Finally, the nature of the students' values and how these affect career decision-making will be analysed (Chapter 5). The concluding chapter (Chapter 6) discusses the key issues arising from this study and the implications for careers advice and education. Chapter 6 also considers the direction that further research into career decision-making might take.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The research for this study was carried out at Edge Hill University. The institution obtained degree awarding powers in 2005 and university status in 2006. In its mission statement Edge Hill describes itself as a 'learning-led' university committed to widening participation. The university's main campus is near Ormskirk in Lancashire, England.

This study focuses on full-time students in the final year of their undergraduate degree. The research was undertaken during February to May 2007, which was the period immediately prior to students completing their studies and graduating.

STAGES INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

This study's focus (see Chapter 1) pointed to the need for a qualitative study that would facilitate a better understanding of the processes, subjective realities, complexities, context and rationale behind the way the students approach the process of career decision-making. The in-depth qualitative data provided by this research complements the large scale quantitative studies that have been carried out into graduate employability (e.g. Connor and Dewson, 2001; Blasko, 2002; CHERI, 2002; Purcell *et al.*, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005).

The research involved two stages:

Stage 1: Initial survey

A range of different types of degree were included in the sampling frame for the initial survey. These included long standing vocational degrees (e.g. Business and Management, Law and Information Systems); newer vocational degrees (e.g. Media, Sport and Marketing) and traditional degrees (e.g. Geography and History). Classes were visited during February 2007 and 165 useable questionnaires were returned.

This stage of the study required students to complete a written questionnaire (see Appendix I). The questionnaire provided information about the extent to which students used the careers service at Edge Hill and the students' characteristics in terms of age, gender, degree studied and their social class. However, the primary objective of the questionnaire was to identify working class students who were willing to participate in the study. In order to obtain enough volunteers a £20 payment was offered to those selected to be interviewed.

The students were defined as working class if they were categorised as being from lower SEG backgrounds using the 'Office of National Statistics Socio-economic Classification – User Manual' (see ONS, 2005).[2] We were able to classify 38 students (23 per cent of the sample) as working class. Statistics from Edge Hill's Department of Student Recruitment and Widening Participation suggest that about 40 per cent[3] of our final year students are from lower socio-economic groups, so this is a lower figure than we would expect. The

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[2] On the questionnaire the students were asked the same question included on the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) application form. The only adjustment made was to increase the age where the student's rather than a parent's, step-parent's or guardian's occupation is used to determine social class from 25 to 28 years (see Appendix I). This is to take account of the fact that it is approximately three years after these students first completed their UCAS forms.

[3] This figure originates from the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Their statistics are not, however, fully comprehensive because a large proportion of students remain unclassified. Our experience suggests that because the question used to classify students simply asks for a job title it is often difficult to determine a student's SEG. This meant we were sometimes unable to accurately classify students which had the effect of depressing the number of working class students in our sample. Similar problems are identified by Elias and Purcell (2004) who admitted that 'Occupational classification for comparative statistical analysis has to be done on the basis of limited information; normally job titles, with very little further detail about the work context or role played' (p. 18).

questionnaire did, nevertheless, provide us with enough students for the next stage of the research, if not the opportunity to be selective about the students we included.

Stage 2: Interviews

Thirty students were interviewed between the end of February and the beginning of May 2007. The interviews usually lasted between 45-60 minutes and covered topics such as the student's education, work experience, hobbies, interests, etc.; details about their family and friends; their career aspirations; the career decision-making process they were undertaking or planned to engage in; and their awareness of the graduate labour market (see Appendix II).

In order to promote discussion an 'interview guide' (Buchanan *et al*., 1988, p. 59) rather than a structured questionnaire was utilised. This guide consisted of a series of key questions, but with some prompts, to help us probe further during the interview. This approach provided the flexibility to explore issues with the students being interviewed, but it also ensured key topics were covered.

The interviews were taped and later transcribed. There may be concerns that the presence of a tape recorder inhibits people. Yet our own experience, confirmed by these interviews, is that people quickly disregard the fact that they are being taped (see Easterby-Smith *et al*., 1991; Gillham, 2000 for similar comments). Tape recording also provides an accurate record of what was said (Gillham, 2000) and it allows the interviewer to concentrate on listening rather than making notes. As Bassey (1999) points out tape recording permits the researcher to 'attend to the direction rather than the detail of the interview' (p. 81).

Tape recording also enabled direct quotes to be used in the subsequent writing up of the research. The following, adapted from Maynard (1991, pp. 486-487), was used to describe additional verbal and non-verbal information:

Emphasis - 'It was a PROBLEM'.	The use of capitals represents emphasis in terms of volume or pitch.
Transcription conveniences - 'I didn't (laugh) do anything'.	Words in parentheses indicate characteristics of talk or non-verbal gestures.
- 'I said (waves arms) go away'.	

There is a difference between the spoken and written word, and transferring the former to the latter sometime makes the meaning less clear. Nevertheless, words have been written down in the way they were spoken because to do otherwise would misrepresent those being interviewed and may inadvertently change their meaning. Angled [] rather than curved parentheses have, however, been used to include non-spoken words that help clarify what was said.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Table 2.1 (below) provides an overview of the characteristics of the students interviewed.

Table 2.1 The characteristics of the students interviewed

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	16	53.3%
Female	14	46.7%
Age		
Young (under 25 years old)	29	96.7%
Older (25 years or older)	1	3.3%
Family experience of HE		
First generation HE	28	93.3%
At least one parent/step-		
parent/guardian has a degree	2	6.7%
Socio-economic group		
Managerial	1	3.3%
Skilled manual	22	73.3%
Semi-skilled	4	13.3%
Unskilled	3	10.0%
Degree subject		
Business and Management	6	20.0%
Geography	2	6.7%
History	2	6.7%
Information Systems	4	13.3%
Law	3	10.0%
Marketing	3	10.0%
Media	2	6.7%
Sport (or sport related)	8	26.7%

As can be seen, there is a fairly even mix of male and female students. The vast majority of the students interviewed were under 25. In fact just one student was in the older age category and she was only 26. All but two students are 'first generation' students.

Nearly three-quarters of the students are from skilled manual backgrounds. Whilst this is the largest sub-group within the working class participating in HE (see for example UCAS, 2001), statistics suggest that we might have expected more students from semi and unskilled backgrounds in our sample.

One of the students did not fall into the lower SEG category. This occurred because in the Stage 1 questionnaire the student described his father as a machine operator, but in the interview revealed he had recently been promoted to a management role. It could, however, be argued that for most of his life the student's father has been a skilled manual worker and so he has been brought up in a working class environment. This is an example of the ambiguity of social class which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

Finally, the students are studying on a range of degree programmes, but Business and Management, Information Systems and Sport are heavily represented. The distribution in our sample broadly reflects the size of different courses at Edge Hill. In addition, Sport covers a number of degrees (i.e. Sport Development, Sports Studies and Sport Science).

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

It may appear from the way this chapter is organised that the research undertaken for this study involved a linear process with data analysis following data collection. In practice, of course data analysis is a continuous process that takes place from the point at which data is collected. Nevertheless, after the interviews had been transcribed the focus of the research did turn to analysis. Whilst qualitative data analysis involves an element of intuition (Atkinson and Delamont, 1985; Stake, 1995; Gillham, 2000),[4] this was applied in conjunction with a systematic approach utilising matrices, mapping and quantitative methods.

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[4] Bourdieu (1988) points out that only somebody who has not undertaken empirical research could make a claim for a perfectly transparent and systematic approach that did not involve 'a proportion of what is called 'intuition'' (p. 6).

Matrices

Qualitative data is both detailed and complex. In order to make sense of this data matrices were used to categorise different aspects of the student's career decision-making and the rationale behind it. These matrices provided an overview and enabled comparisons to be more easily made by identifying 'singularities, regularities and variations within the data' (Dey, 1993, p. 195). It can be argued that the categorisations in a matrix reflect the perspective of the researcher and the theoretical position they adopt (Sayer, 1992). This is inevitable and is a criticism that can be levelled against other forms of research. In this study we attempted to ground the categorisations in the data itself. We are not arguing that we adopted a fully grounded approach (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Straus and Corbin, 1997), because existing theories and perspectives will always influence the categorisation of data. However, we consciously tried to detach ourselves from established theories by focusing on what the data was saying. It can also be argued that the use of matrices is reductionist and fails to reflect the complexity and 'messiness' of the data being analysed (Simons, 1996; Dubois, 1996). The matrices were, however, only used as a starting point for analysis.

Mapping

According to Schwenk (2002) cognitive mapping dates back to the 1940s when it was used to map decision-making processes in laboratory experiments. We utilised cognitive mapping as a way of modelling the career decision-making processes of the students interviewed. This technique uses diagrams to provide a better understanding of the factors influencing each student's decision-making. The process of cognitive mapping assists in conceptualising processes, relationships and causality.

Quantitative methods

When data is categorised it is often helpful to quantify the number of occurrences taking place. This helps to determine the importance of different influences on the students' career decision-making. As Silverman (1993) states 'if you are trying to get some feel about the data as a whole … it may sometimes be useful to use certain quantitative measures,

however crude they may be' (p. 204). Therefore, where it was felt to be appropriate, simple quantitative measures such as frequencies, percentages and averages have been utilised.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study involved 30 in-depth interviews with final year students across a range of degree subjects. The interviews provided us with a substantial amount of very rich data. In order to reduce researcher bias we have been systematic in our approach to the analysis of data. We also feel that because the two authors come from different backgrounds (one is a lecturer and the other is a careers adviser) this has helped to provide a check on each other's pre-existing perspectives and values. The results of this analysis are now set out in the following three chapters.

CHAPTER 3

FINANCIAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

The evidence suggests that working class students are more likely than those from middle class backgrounds to engage in term-time working because of the financial pressures upon them (Blasko, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003 citing Little *et al.*, 2003). Research also indicates that working class students, on average, work longer hours than their middle class peers (e.g. Pennel and West, 2005 cite a number of studies: Paulsen and St. John, 2002; Callender and Wilson, 2003; Metcalf, 2003). This study provides support for this because the modal average for the working class students in this sample is 15-20 hours, which appears to be higher than the hours worked by the general student population (see Moreau and Leathwood, 2006 who state that most surveys put the average number of hours worked at between 10 and 15 hours).

The need to work during term-time may have an adverse impact upon the students' ability to prepare for graduate careers and engage effectively in the career decision-making process. A lack of money may also act as a constraint on the extent to which working class students are geographically mobile in the graduate labour market. This chapter will consider each of these issues in turn.

DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY

It is argued that because working class students are busy combining their studies with term-time employment they have less opportunity to engage in non-remunerated career enhancing activities such as volunteering, non-paid work experience, arts and cultural activities, sport and overseas study (Pitcher and Purcell, 1998; Hatcher, 1998; CHERI,

2002; Morey *et al*., 2003; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Humphrey, 2006). For example, Moreau and Leathwood (2006, p. 38) argue that:

> With the need to work in order to fund their studies, students from working-class backgrounds are less likely to be able to take up opportunities for voluntary/unpaid work in their chosen field than their middle-class peers, with potential consequences for their attainment of graduate employment.

There is evidence to support the contention that working class students are less likely to engage in non-paid career enhancing activities (e.g. Blasko, 2002; Walpole, 2003). This is important because research suggests that student involvement in such activities has a positive effect on employment outcomes (Blasko, 2002; Tchibozo, 2007; Adnett and Slack, 2007 citing CHERI, 2003). According to Blasko (2002) 'even a couple of hours weekly involvement in extra-curricular activities can result ceteris paribus in a significant increase of the quality of the job held 3-4 years after graduation' (p. 49).

The majority of the students in this study do not seem to have engaged in sporting and other non-remunerated activities since leaving school. There also appears to be a further decline in their involvement in such activities once they arrive at university. For instance, one student who participated extensively in sport at school said, 'I don't have time to do nothing. I just work and sleep'. A history student, who intends to join the police, also said he did not pursue his interest in cricket at university because of time constraints:

> I think its just time really. My parents wanted me to concentrate on my studies. I still play for a cricket team outside of uni, but it doesn't really take up too much of my time. I was a bit worried, looking at the sports teams here, that I think that they just eat away your time. My part-time job also means it's either one or the other. If you look at a lot of people on the different sports teams there's not many of them do actually have part-time jobs ... I don't really have that option.

This student, who works for 16 hours a week in his term-time job, is blaming a lack of time for not playing cricket for the university. He is, however, also indicating that his parents had an influence on his decision to concentrate on his studies. This suggests that, unlike those from middle class backgrounds (see Brown and Hesketh, 2004), working class students and their parents may be unaware of the importance of extra-curricular activities. In fact the majority of the students in this study reveal a lack of appreciation of the importance of such activities to future employment outcomes. This is reflected by the fact that students who are not working in term-time employment, and who should therefore face less constraints in respect of time, are no more likely to engage in non-paid career enhancing activities.

In order to enhance their employability the students, instead, tend to focus on obtaining a 'good degree', or what Pitcher and Purcell (1998) refer to as the 'essential 2:1' (p. 194). This is despite evidence suggesting that the majority of 'traditional graduate employers' are looking for:

> applicants who can do everything: achieve high grades, provide evidence of participation in creative or sporting activities, demonstrate 'well-spent' vacations – whether in employment or other impressive activities such as adventurous travel or voluntary work – *and* find the time and energy to submit excellent, well-focused applications.   (Pitcher and Purcell, 1998, p. 194, italics in original)

The students in this study also value paid work experience above other forms of extra-curricular activity. For example, an information systems student felt that it was enough that she had 'good marks' and 'a lot of work experience'. This student - like the vast majority of students in this study - failed to appreciate that it was not work experience *per se*, but acquiring skills and experience relevant to their future careers that was important (Stewart and Knowles, 2000). As such, the students applied for term-time jobs on the basis of wage levels and convenience, rather than the extent to which they were relevant to their future career aspirations (for similar comments see Little, 2002).

Not surprisingly the majority of term-time jobs are semi-skilled/routine in nature with occupations such as shop assistant and bar worker being the most popular. These jobs enable students to acquire and develop useful skills, but not to the extent that other more highly skilled employment would. It could also be argued that these jobs may not provide the opportunity to develop the values and dispositions (i.e. cultural capital) sought by graduate employers (see Brown and Hesketh, 2004) or contacts (i.e. social capital) that might help them to obtain graduate employment.

DECISION-MAKING AND APPLYING FOR JOBS

It is argued that the need to work long hours in term-time jobs also restricts the ability of students to engage in career decision-making activities (i.e. collecting and evaluating information on different career options) or the process of applying for jobs and attending interviews and assessment centres (Furlong and Cartmel, 2005). This is important, because according to Blasko (2002), early engagement with career planning appears to have a positive influence on the students' employment outcomes, both in the short and the longer-term.

Attributing this lack of engagement in the career decision-making process to term-time working may again be overly simplistic. This is because there did not appear to be any relationship between the amount of hours students worked in their term-time jobs and their engagement with career decision-making. For example, a business and management student worked for 20 hours a week but still found time to apply for eight trainee management positions and attend job interviews; whilst another student on the same course who had no term-time work commitments had not applied for any jobs.

About one-third of the students in this study are not working during their final year. A number of students had made a conscious decision to terminate their term-time jobs before they started the final year of their degree so that they could concentrate on their studies.

For example, one student said, 'I had my last part-time job in summer and then since the third year I haven't worked because I know a lot of emphasis is placed on this year'. This student is therefore not concerned about making time to engage in the career decision-making process (or participate in non-paid career enhancing activities). As Bimrose *et al*. (2005) point out students appear to prioritise academic achievement over the need to find employment.

Some students were able to suspend their term-time jobs because of financial support from their parents. It is therefore important to note that students from working class backgrounds do not necessarily have limited access to financial resources. Those from skilled manual backgrounds are often from families who are relatively well off, especially if both parents are working. These families may also have put money aside to help their children through university. The parents of a sports science student had, for example, saved enough money to buy her a car so that she could commute to university. In other instances students relied on grants and loans, or employment during the summer vacation, to enable them to concentrate on their studies during the final year of their degree.

It may therefore be overly simplistic to 'blame' term time working for the students' lack of engagement in career decision-making. Whilst term time working is undoubtedly an influence (especially for those students working excessive hours), the fact that career planning is not prioritised appears to be equally, if not more, important. It seems that this tendency to prioritise academic work largely arises because the deadlines for these are imminent. As one student, who did not have the distraction of a term-time job, pointed out:

> In the third year you're snowed under with like the dissertation and stuff and everyone's going: 'I'll have to go to the careers department; I'll have to go to the careers department'. But no one EVER seems to be able to, you know, make that jump, just because you've got dissertations building up and WHEN DO YOU FIND THAT TIME?

This tendency to focus on the present is a common behavioural characteristic amongst decision-makers of all kinds (Bazerman, 2006). People making decisions tend to prioritise present concerns over future concerns, even when this may be inconsistent with achieving longer-term success because of what Bazerman (2006, p. 65) refers to as the 'vividness of the present'. Similarly, Greenbank (2007) discusses how students, rather than working on a number of assignments simultaneously, adopt a 'serial approach' to study which involves working on and completing each piece of course work before moving on to the next (prioritised in terms of deadlines). This type of approach is replicated in respect of careers as a sport science student demonstrates when he admits: 'I like to try and concentrate on one thing at a time; I'm not very good at splitting my attention really'. Similarly, an information system student states:

> I've got a lot on my mind with all the course work. I just want to get the coursework out of the way … I'm focused on the course rather than what I am doing after it.

A geography student also states that he will delay looking for a job until after he graduates. He argues that he is typical of most other students, which is why he does not see his approach as problematic:

> I don't think there's any rush at the moment. I know there's a big hype on getting in early and stuff but I'd rather concentrate on uni at the minute. There's plenty of jobs. But it's just like right now I just don't want to do it. I want to see how it goes over Easter before I apply anywhere else. And as I say most people don't start looking until after they have left uni.

This combination of concentrating on one task at a time rather than carrying out a number of tasks simultaneously, and prioritising those tasks that are of immediate concern, means that career planning activities are inevitably put on hold. The problem is that career planning continues to be postponed because there is a continuous flow of other more urgent

tasks that need to be completed.[5] This is exacerbated by the fact that many students have part-time jobs they can continue in, and often turn into full-time jobs, once they have graduated. As such, there is no financial pressure on them to secure employment during their final year of study. Moreover, some students have already made a conscious decision to remain in their term time jobs. For example, one student is planning to join the police but is going to stay in his term-time job for a couple of years to gain more work and life experience. Another student is planning to work for a year after graduation in the property rating firm where he is currently employed and then consider his options:

> I'll take the JOB ON, see what degree I get and look at graduate jobs to start
> next year … Start looking and applying for them if I feel like it, that's
> basically IT really.

Similarly, an information systems student who is working in a packing factory as a booking-out clerk said:

> I know you're supposed to start looking for jobs early so that when you finish
> uni you've got a job waiting for you. But because I've got a job already I'm a
> little bit more relaxed about getting into a job.

Other students are considering turning their term-time jobs into more permanent forms of employment. An information systems student who currently works as an assistant manager in a charity shop is considering an offer to manage her own shop. Indeed, some of the students find they enjoy their term-time jobs and are content to remain in them, at least for the time being. For example, one student who intends to stay in his term-time job until he decides exactly what he wants to do said:

> I did look at the graduate jobs this year and realised that because I've got a job
> which I enjoy, I don't want to start looking into that because I've got quite a

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[5] It can be argued that many of the students are carrying out more than one role by combining being a student with part-time employment. Therefore, adopting a 'serial approach' may be a way of coping with their already complex lives.

lot of [university] work to do and I just felt like, to add more work for no reason, when I like my job, there's no point. So with getting more information with graduate jobs next year I'll be able to get more understanding and have a look at more jobs that COULD interest me.

Furlong and Cartmel's (2005) longitudinal study of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or remote areas of Scotland found that two-thirds of them remained in their term-time jobs after graduation. This also seems likely to be the case for a significant number of the working class students graduating from Edge Hill.

GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

There is evidence to suggest that students from working class backgrounds are restricted geographically in where they are able to apply for jobs (e.g. Pollard *et al.*, 2004; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005). For example, in Furlong and Cartmel's (2005) Scottish study they found 'respondents were reluctant to move and most expressed an overwhelming preference to work in their home town or the west of Scotland' (p. 19). This research provides support for this with over half the students indicating they want to find a job within commuting distance of their home.

Thomas and Jones (2007, p. 31) citing Dolton and Silles (2001) suggest that students from lower SEGs might 'lack the financial resources required for geographical relocation and may therefore be less able to capitalise on career opportunities'. The students in this study did not, however, give this as a reason for their lack of geographical mobility. They were more likely to cite the psychological need to be close to their family and friends, family pressure to remain in the locality, and as discussed above, a desire to remain in their term-time jobs.

This preference to remain close to home had already manifested itself at the point where the students made their decision about which university to attend. All but four of the students

interviewed were from the north-west of England with the majority coming from within a thirty mile radius of the university.

It might be expected that students living at home with their parents (just over half the students in this sample) would be more likely to indicate a preference for remaining in their local area. This was not, however, the case - probably because the majority of students living away from their parents still remain within their home region. For example, a history student lives with other students in a house close to the university but his parents only live 20 miles away. He intends to join the police and plans to apply for jobs in the north-west of England:

> There's a couple of counties further south, Essex Police are crying out for officers. I think that's a bit too far for me to travel. I don't think I'm ready to leave all my friends just yet. That's one of the reasons I chose Edge Hill as well because it's quite close to home. I'm still close to my family, I always go for a drink with my Dad at weekend, I always see my friends at weekends.

As Alford (1998) suggests, many students 'remain firmly connected to their home environment' (p. 225).

There are a small number of students who indicate a willingness to move. One student, for example, plans to join the Royal Navy. Yet, whilst her father thinks this is a good career choice, her mother is unhappy about the prospect of her daughter moving away. As the student states:

> My dad can't wait – he thinks it's one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life. He misses me when I'm not there but he'd rather me be happy … My mum is more the emotional blackmail, she doesn't want me to go so she'll cry and get angry with me. So I've got all that to put up with. (Laughs and rolls her eyes up to the ceiling).

This student is therefore under emotional pressure from her mother to remain at home. Similarly, a media student describes how he feels the need to remain in close geographical proximity to his mother because she is on her own since his father left her and would be 'distraught' (his words) if he moved away. A sport development student also admits his family are an influence on him staying in the north-west of England, particularly his mother and sister. He said he had thought about applying for a couple of jobs in Scotland but:

> I got a bit of bad vibes from my sister (laughs and looks embarrassed) … My sister didn't like the idea of me going all the way up to Scotland or whatever, and [neither did] my mum.

Therefore, many of the students in this study feel the need to seek employment in their home area, or they are put under pressure to do so by their family.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates that many working class students are not actively involved in career enhancing activities that develop their employability. The majority of students are also failing to engage seriously in the career decision-making process. In fact most students had, at the time of their interview, still not applied for even one graduate job. The majority of students also indicate that they wish to remain within commuting distance of their home when looking for jobs.

Existing research has identified limited financial resources as an important factor influencing such behaviour. Whilst this is likely to be a factor, this study suggests that the students' beliefs and values may be more important influences on their career decision-making behaviour. For example, many students feel that if they obtain a good degree and have some work experience this will enable them to obtain graduate employment. They do not, therefore, feel under pressure to further develop their employability, or to start the career decision-making process until after they graduate. This belief in the efficacy of their

approach seems to be reinforced by a perception that their peers are adopting similar strategies to themselves. They also believe that leaving career decision-making until after they have graduated will provide them with more time to reflect on the different options available to them.

Back to contents

CHAPTER 4

NETWORKS

INTRODUCTION

Students operate within a complex set of relationships made up of parents, relatives, friends, professionals (i.e. teachers, lecturers and careers advisers) and other people they come into contact with through their term-time jobs, sporting activities, etc. These relationships or 'networks' represent forms of social capital that may be utilised in the career decision-making process. For example, networks may be used to obtain information and advice, or they may provide access to job opportunities. Ferlander (2004) contends that it is the quality of the 'resources' that these relationship provide access to that is important. In this respect, it is argued that working class students are likely to have 'inferior' levels of social capital (Blasko, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005; Thomas and Jones, 2007). For example, Furlong and Cartmel (2005) contend that 'those from poorer families may lack the contacts that can provide information about graduate job opportunities' (p. 23).

This chapter begins by examining how students utilise the networks provided by their family and friends. It then examines the extent to which professionals, particularly careers advisers, are consulted as part of the career decision-making process. The chapter ends by considering the importance of role models to career decision-making.

FAMILY NETWORKS

Nearly all the students spoke highly of their parents. Yet they almost universally acknowledged that their parents could only provide emotional support rather than practical advice. This is because their parents had no experience of the types of job they would be

applying for in the graduate labour market. For example, a media student said she did not feel her parents (who are employed as a bus driver and a shop assistant) could provide much help because:

> They haven't really got that educational background as such … My work goes a little bit over their head … they don't really understand it. As much as they would like to TRY and help me, I don't really think that they CAN that much.

Similarly, a history student said he does not go to his parents (who are employed as a machinist and a nursery nurse) because:

> It's not actually something they know about. I mean, like I say they couldn't have been more supportive, but I think it's a job they don't really have much idea about. It's the same with university – they're very supportive – but they don't understand the lecture and the seminar and so on. But they're very interested. The first thing, as soon as I get through the front door at the weekend, the first thing they ask me is 'how's it gone this week'. My mum phones me EVERY day.

Other students made similar comments:

> He [the student's father] has always had a trade, he's always been a plumber and that's not an area where I see myself so I guess I don't really go to my dad for advice.

> He's [the student's father] had the same job for like twenty years or so. He's a general labourer so he probably wouldn't really know (laughs) wouldn't know like. He didn't have to do a degree or anything so he wouldn't know about graduate jobs.

My parents don't even know what an A, B or C is, never mind what a two-two or a two-one is – so they've no idea about careers. I never talk to them about it. I talk to my friends and lecturers.

Parents seem to be aware of their limitations because the students often said that decisions relating to educational issues such as what to study at college and university and which university to go to were left to them. An information studies student, for example, maintained that his parents were very supportive but left the decision-making to him:

It was like if you want to do a degree, [do] whatever you want to do. They don't pressurise me, they just say decide what you want to do and we'll back you whatever you want to do.

Similarly, a business and management student's parents advised him to, 'Go with what you think is best for you'.

In the few cases where students did consult their parents, it tended to be a particular parent who was perceived to be well-informed or knowledgeable. Sometimes this was linked to the parent's occupation. For example, a marketing student said she consulted her mother because she is a team leader in a call centre. Similarly, a sports studies student goes to her mother, who is a librarian, rather than her father (a painter and decorator) for advice:

My mum's the one to ask at home, not my dad. Like, my dad will try and help but it's just, it'll always end up back at my mum. It's just the way it is.

At other times parents were seen as knowledgeable, but not because of the occupation they had. Although the mother of a sports science student did not have any formal education beyond school and had an unskilled job her son thought she 'could have gone to university if she had had the opportunity'. This student went to his mother for advice because:

> Mum is very educated. She shouldn't be where she is today. She just knows a
> lot of things –she's very very bright. She's always made the right moves
> buying houses, decisions involving me and my sister and stuff like that.

Interestingly, the two students who did have parents who are graduates (see Table 2.1) did not consult them about their careers. Both these students came across as being very independent (a characteristic that will be discussed in more detail below).

This also raises the issue of ambiguities in the students' social class. In this research we determined their socio-economic status in the same way as UCAS (see Chapter 2). This meant we categorised students according to the occupation of the highest earning parent, step-parent or guardian (see UCAS, 2001, p. 15). However, whilst the highest earner may have an occupation that is categorised as being in a lower SEG, their partner could have a lower paid but higher status job. Therefore, one student's mother is educated to degree level and is a further education lecturer, but his father, a self-employed carpet fitter, is the highest earner. Another student's father is an HGV driver (again the highest paid parent) and his mother works as an administrator in local government. In this study, it is the father (who is often employed in skilled manual work) who is typically the highest earner; whilst it is their spouse who has a middle class (although less well paid) occupation, often involving skilled non-manual work. Whether there are significant differences between skilled manual and skilled non-manual workers is of course open to debate (see UCAS, 2002 for similar comments).

Students also have brothers, sisters and other relatives who have middle class occupations. For example, one student has a sister who is a teacher; another's brother has a middle ranking position in a bank; whilst one student has an uncle who is the chief executive of a major retailer. Altogether 18 out of the 30 students interviewed in this study have some form of middle class influence within their family. As a result, about half the students we interviewed had approached other family members (e.g. aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins), who are in relatively high status jobs, for advice. For instance, a sports science student's father is a service engineer, but his brothers (the student's uncles) are in

professional occupations (one is a dentist, one is a medical researcher and the other is a solicitor). According to this student:

> My dad doesn't really understand THAT SIDE [university and graduate employment]. You know you have to describe to him how your classification of your degree works … he doesn't really understand that at ALL, so I'VE got to explain that TO HIM. But if I need any advice or anything like that then I just go to one of my uncles to speak to.

A marketing student consults her uncle who was a manager before he retired. She said:

> He's very knowledgeable in the like business world and that because he's been a manager before. He knows a lot, so if I need any advice or help he's the first port of call.

These middle class relatives can have an important influence on the students' career decision-making, even when students resist their advice. For example, an information systems student has an aunt educated to PhD level who is a senior manager in a pharmaceutical company. He refers derogatorily to her as his 'high flying aunt' and does not appreciate her suggestions:

> I remember one time my auntie came down and she writes out this revision schedule, and 'you should do this, do this, and DO THE OTHER' and that was sort of, it was a big turning point because I just thought well it's very good of you, but everyone's an individual and NOBODY is going to tell ME WHAT TO DO, NOBODY.

However, later in the interview he admits that his aunt's influence may account for his decision to start considering careers issues in his second year:

At SOME POINT you've GOT to think about your future, there's no POINT putting it off, and putting it OFF, because it will all just come back to creep up on you and you're sort of stood there just going oh eek, what do I do now? Probably some of the advice off my high-flying auntie HELPED because you know, she's always said you should plan your future, you should do this you should do the other, and I mean, THAT to an extent HAS helped me a lot.

Therefore, middle class relatives can influence the career decision-making behaviour of students even when they are resistant to advice. In the same way, the two students who have mothers who are graduates have undoubtedly been influenced by this in some way, even though they both claim not to actively seek out their advice

In contrast, there is also evidence to suggest that a number of students feel estranged from family members who have had no experience of higher education. A law student, for instance, said she did not talk about university or jobs to her relatives because they would think she was 'showing off'. She said: 'None of them have been to university. Most of them left school at sixteen so they don't really know, and they'd just think I was showing off'. Similarly, a business and management student stated:

I went to my Granddad's funeral, two years ago it would be nearly, and one of my cousins said to me we don't talk to people like you now. My Dad was fuming. Something about now you're doing a degree type of thing, you think you're too good for us.

As we will see below some students have similar experiences with their friends.

FRIENDS

There appeared to be very few cases where students were able to obtain practical advice and assistance from their friends. One exception was where the friend of a geography

student was able to arrange a work placement for him. Similarly, a marketing student has a friend in a senior position in large company who was also able to help him obtain work experience. A law student also consulted a friend who is a careers adviser.

The role of friends is similar to the role adopted by the student's parents. They therefore tend to be able to offer emotional support rather than be in a position to provide advice and assistance. This is because their friends are students (at Edge Hill and other universities); or they are in relatively low level jobs. Indeed, their friends from home are generally employed in jobs within the lower SEG category. As a result, there is some evidence of a growing divide between many of the students and their friends from home. The reason for this is articulated by an information systems student who said:

> As soon as you go to university I feel you become middle class, even though
> you haven't got the money, you sort of become middle class. It's not so much
> the money side, it's how you are.

The fact that they are changing as a result of going to university led some students to feel increasingly alienated from their friends. For example, a business and management student admits that the relationship she has with her 'old' friends - who left school at sixteen and went into jobs - has changed:

> I don't really see them anymore … We're not as close as we used to be. I do
> talk to them, but my friends have changed since university I used to hang
> around with a few people but I don't anymore. It's almost like we've got
> nothing to say.

She goes on to say she feels they live in a completely different world to her. Likewise, another student describes the problems she has with her old friends:

> They're earning a lot more money than me and they can do all that stuff
> [going out] and they're like just come, just come. And I'm like having to say

no, you know what I mean? They think I'm boring at the moment, but they don't really understand that it's my final year and like I've really got to pass. To be honest they're not very supportive. They're like I've left school and I've got my job now and that type of thing … I don't think they understand like about uni because none of them like actually went to uni or nothing like that.

Another student is aware of how her values are now significantly different to those of her old friends:

To be honest a lot of my old friends, as I call them, are deadbeats. They're more interested in day to day life whereas I'm thinking ahead. I'm thinking, yes okay, you might be happy like when you're turned sixteen and stuff and you're getting wages and you're thinking oh yes you've got lots of money. And I think yes well I might not have that much money now, but just imagine what I am going to have when I finish. A lot of my friends come from like council estates and stuff and I just could not bear, I just could not bear living on a council estate for the rest of my life.

This student - along with many of the students in this study – is looking at the values and lifestyles of her old friends as something she wants to distance herself from. She is psychologically disengaging herself from the habitus she was once part of:

I look at what people are doing NOW, like my old friends. I just look at them and think – I DON'T want to be like you. I want to get as FAR AWAY (laughs) from being you as I can humanly get.

In contrast, another student is at pains to explain that he does not look down on his friends at home by insisting: 'I am one of them. Just because I'm here doesn't make me any different'. However, he still distances himself from their way of life. For instance, he talks

about how they are not in 'proper jobs' and are doing 'silly things on the side' and are 'not really aspiring to be anything special'.

PROFESSIONALS

As they come through the education system the students have access to professional advice from teachers, lecturers and careers advisers. Just under a quarter of the sample mentioned speaking to teachers: either at their school or once they went to college; and nearly half the students (14 of the sample) had talked to their lecturers whilst at Edge Hill about issues relating to careers. This was a much higher figure than Counsell (1996) found in his study of business school students, where only 11.3 per cent had consulted their tutors about careers.

The students in this study are also much more likely to discuss careers with a lecturer than with a careers adviser. In part, this appears to be because lecturers are generally more accessible than careers advisers – the students can, for example, approach their tutors informally after lecturers and seminars. However, the students also stressed the importance of knowing their lecturers and being at ease with them. As one student said of one of her lecturers:

> I talk to [gives name of lecturer] quite a lot. I think it's because I have a good rapport with him. I find him REALLY easy to talk to and I respect what he says.

The other issue picked up at the end of this quote is that students tend to approach lecturers who they perceive to be knowledgeable about careers issues. Therefore, a law student who intends to become a solicitor discussed careers with a lecturer who is a qualified solicitor. Similarly, a geography student approached a tutor because he is working with industry as a consultant. In contrast, one student feels that the department where he is studying are only

interested in academic work and for this reason he would not approach the academic staff about issues relating to careers.

Despite extensive efforts to publicise the different services offered by Edge Hill's Careers Centre, just under a quarter (23.3 per cent) of the students interviewed for this study had attended a careers interview. This compares to 23.6 per cent of the 165 students completing the questionnaire for the first stage of this research. This suggests that working class students are no more reluctant than the general population of students to participate in an interview with a careers adviser, although conclusions have to be tentative because we are dealing with small sample sizes.

There are a number of reasons why students are reluctant to arrange an interview with a careers adviser:

1. The students seemed to prefer talking to people they know. When a sports science student, for example, was asked why he did not talk to professional advisers in the careers centre he said: 'When I think about asking people for help, I think of more, asking people that I KNOW, like my friends or a lecturer'. Similarly, a marketing student remarked: 'I didn't actually know people in there [careers] and I prefer to talk to people I know like my uncle and mum'. An information systems student also said: 'They're probably nice people, they're probably okay like, but I just don't know anything about them, I'm not aware of them, I'm not familiar with them'. A number of the students had, however, met the careers staff through careers modules and presentations. This did encourage some of them to visit the careers centre for advice. Yet it also meant that several of these students no longer felt the need for one-to-one careers advice, especially if they had studied a careers module.

2. Some students are reluctant to approach the careers staff because they feared being humiliated and embarrassed (similar comments are made by Quinn *et al.*, 2005). The students seemed to believe that because they had not engaged in the process of career planning the careers advisers would think they were 'stupid'. As a law student said: 'If I

went to an interview I wouldn't know what to say, I wouldn't know what to ask. I'd think I would be wasting their time'.

3. A small number of students felt intimidated by the location and set-up of the careers service. One student did not know where the careers centre was and when they were shown they described it as 'scary'. However, other students felt the way the careers centre was set out was very welcoming.

4. A small number of students had decided on their career paths and therefore did not feel the need for careers advice. Many of these students lacked an awareness of the range of services offered by careers. They did not know, for instance, that they could obtain advice about how to approach the selection process. For example, a student who had been unsuccessful when applying for jobs did not go to the careers service for guidance because he was not aware that they could help him analyse where he might be going wrong.

5. Quite a number of students are not yet considering careers (at least seriously) and therefore did not feel the need to visit the careers centre. A couple of students did not even know they could apply for jobs before they graduated.

6. Some students admitted that they wanted to be independent and did not like the idea of depending on others for advice. As one student admitted, 'I think some of the times there's like a stubbornness to ask'.

7. For several students the careers service was invisible or at best barely noticed. As a sports science student admitted 'it just didn't even enter my head' to come in to the careers centre for advice. Other students claimed to not know where the careers service is located.

8. A small number of students feel alienated from the careers service because of their previous experience of careers advice in school and college. For example, one student said:

> At the high school and the college the advice that you got was basically a load
> of HOGWASH. Obviously, a careers department in a uni is completely
> DIFFERENT, but it's just this STIGMA that I've got attached to it.

Therefore, whilst this student recognises that the careers service at university is likely to be different from his previous experience of such services, he still found it difficult to overcome his negative feelings. Similarly, Bowman *et al*. (2000) found that poor experiences of careers guidance at school were enough to prevent the master's degree students in their study from visiting university careers services.

9. Finally, some students confessed to lacking motivation. One student, for example, admitted he was 'too bone idle' to arrange an interview with the careers service; whilst another said:

> I think it's just laziness. Or it might be a bit like, because I've NEVER DONE
> IT before, it's just actually going doing it and getting an interview. Maybe as
> well, it's because I'm like living at home and Monday's the only day that I'm
> in and at 6.00pm I can't wait to get home because I'm tired.

The latter part of this quote identifies the problem of persuading commuter students to engage in activities based at the university unless it fits in with their existing timetabled commitments. For example, one student admitted to missing an appointment because it 'wasn't on the same day that I was going to be in uni'.

Greenbank (2007) found this resistance to coming into university is often blamed on term-time working, but in interviews the students admitted it really occurred because they preferred to work at home, especially now that they have remote access to the university's learning resources. These students, referred to by Redwood (2006) as 'wash n' go students', often do not feel part of the university. This is exemplified by the comments of a sport development student:

I don't tend to come to places down here really [the Student Information Centre where the careers service is housed] … I think because I'm a travel-in student I don't see myself as part of (rubs forehead) I don't know, it's something to do with being a travel-in student. I don't see myself, I don't know, as part of, I can't word it, but it is something to do with the fact that I don't live on or in the area that I don't bother getting involved.

This lack of involvement in university life is an important factor. It not only means that students fail to obtain careers guidance, but it also leads to a lack of engagement in extra-curricular activities run through the university.

ROLE MODELS

The interviews revealed that some individuals within the students' network become powerful role models for them. This meant that the students admired and respected these individuals to such an extent they wanted to be like them. Over half the students had, at some point, been influenced by a role model. Teachers provided the most common form of role model with seven students mentioning their teachers. This is probably one reason for the popularity of teaching as an intended career destination for a significant number of the working class students in this study. A good example is provided by sports development student who said:

There was a teacher in Years 7 and 8 and I just thought she was like, the bees knees. I was like, I'm going to be HER, I'm going to be a PE TEACHER. That's what I'm going to DO.

Similarly, a sports science student also decided he wanted to be a physical education teacher whilst at school:

My PE teachers had a big massive influence on me. The lifestyle they had, they were young, they were physically fit, they were clever, they had nice cars - you know what I mean? They were educated. And they got to do their job in like a tracksuit instead of a suit.

This student has now been accepted on to a PGCE (Post-graduate Certificate in Education). However, other students (including the sports development student quoted above) have now abandoned their ambition to go into teaching. What seems to happen is that over time some students become aware of alternative career possibilities.

The other key source of influence is from family members, particularly older siblings. A business and management student, for example, wants to go into teaching like her elder sister. She has, however, also been heavily influenced by one of her school teachers:

With my school I found that a lot of the teachers seemed like snotty or like didn't get on with the kids. But there was one teacher, and he was ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT, he was from where we're from and he'd dropped out of school and then went back and done all his qualifications and come back as a teacher. And like the respect he got off the kids was brilliant and the results he got was really good as well … it just shows because the kids ABSOLUTELY LOVED HIM

It was important to her that this teacher was from the same disadvantaged area of Liverpool that she was from. This example also shows that students may have more than one role model.

Another student wanted to join the police like her older half-brother, whilst another was heavily influenced by his second-cousin who is a retired chief constable. In fact several students hoped to join the police because they had family or friends in this job.

Many of the students also indicate that they are very uncertain about what they should do after they graduate. They admit this creates significant levels of anxiety for them. As a result, it appears that a number of students latch on to a particular role model. A good example is provided by a sports studies student who admitted to suffering anxiety induced indecision or what Albrecht (1980) refers to as 'decidophobia':

> In the last four months I've changed my job [idea] a million times like, because I was looking at like, going down management or marketing because of doing like modules in that.

However, he has now decided to become a fire-fighter like his cousin:

> I'd never ever really considered it, nothing like that - the police force or anything and then MY COUSIN got into it and he's just I don't know, he's just got like, such a good life out of it … He's been in it four years and he's got himself now like, his own house, like, got a good job, like, good pay for it.

He had also been impressed by his cousin's passing out parade:

> He did his passing out parade and I went to watch it and I don't know, I think I was just amazed by it all, by what they did and then you just saw all the people afterwards and stuff and it's like, to me, it sort of reminds me of like, the military.

Similarly, a business and management student was very unsure about what to do:

> I've never had a definite career in mind. There are some people who know exactly what they want to do and exactly where they want to be by a certain point. I've never had that really.

However, he again latched on to role model: in this case his older brother who works in a bank. This student has therefore decided that he wants a career in banking and has made several job applications to banks.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates that the students are quite rational about who they consult amongst their network of family, friends and other contacts. They talk to people they perceive to be knowledgeable and who can therefore provide them with useful advice. The students do, however, seem reluctant to discuss issues with people they do not know very well. This means they are more likely to discuss careers issues with their lecturers than careers advisers. It is, however, important to note that the working class students in the study do not seem to visit the careers service for advice less frequently than the general student population. On the other hand, it could be argued that because their networks are likely to be inferior to those from middle class backgrounds they should make greater use of the careers service.

This research also identified the influence of role models. These were again drawn from a limited range of contacts which primarily included teachers and family members (particularly older siblings). Some of the students seem to be particularly susceptible to the influence of role models when they are unsure and therefore anxious about which career they should pursue. As such, role models appear to provide an idea for the students to latch on to. However, as Brunsson (2002) points out:

> Making a decision is only a step towards action. A decision is not an end product. [It is] … important to observe that there exist both decisions without actions and actions without decisions. (pp. 110-111)

For many of these students role models from the past have not led to a particular career path. This is because the students have later abandoned the career trajectory motivated by

their role models. Whether the students in this study will act upon an idea provided by a role model remains to be seen. The evidence from this research suggests that only a minority of students will eventually pursue careers inspired by a role model. Given that working class students are likely to be exposed to fewer, and arguably less appropriate role models than their middle class counterparts, this is perhaps just as well.

Back to contents

CHAPTER 5

VALUES

INTRODUCTION

Rokeach (1973) conceptualises values in two ways. First, he identifies instrumental values which are made up of moral values (what a person believes is the 'right' thing to do) and competency values (what a person believes is the most effective thing to do). Second, he refers to terminal values or objectives which are made up of personal values (what an individual hopes to achieve for themselves) and social values (how they wish society to operate). Table 5.1 (below) provides a summary.

Table 5.1 Rokeach's conceptualisation of values

Instrumental values (Conduct)	Terminal values (Objectives)
Competency: 'most effective thing to do'. *Moral*: 'right thing to do'.	*Personal*: relating to individuals. *Social*: relating to society.

A student's values - particularly their competency and personal values - are likely to have a key influence on the way they approach career decision-making and planning. It is argued that an individual's values are largely shaped by the social world they inhabit (Hindess, 1988; Weale, 1992; Hatcher, 1998; Bourdieu, 2003). This can be put into a class context (Miliband, 1969; Bourdieu, 1998, 2003). Miliband (1969), for example, contends that all classes 'not only reproduce themselves physically, but mentally as well, and tend to instil in their children the consciousness, expectations and mental habits associated with their class' (p. 235). Likewise, Bourdieu regards class as primarily a process of enculturation (Milner,

1999). This means an individual's values are 'socially conferred' (Moore, 2004, p. 447) and arise from their class environment or 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1979, 1998).

It can therefore be argued that working class students should have different values to those from middle class backgrounds, and this will influence how they approach career decision-making. The literature[6] suggests that those from working class backgrounds value informal rather than formal information; lack a future orientation and have low aspiration levels. A summary contrasting working class to middle class values is provided in Table 5.2 (below).

Table 5.2 Working class and middle class values

Working class values	*Middle class values*
Value informal ('hot') information rather than formal ('cold') information.	Value rationality and formal sources of information.
Lack a future orientation. They therefore live for today and do not want to defer gratification. Fatalistic (and pessimistic) attitude to life.	Willing to make sacrifices in order to secure benefits at a future date. A belief that they have control over their destiny and an optimistic attitude to life.
Lack of ambition and low aspiration levels.	Driven by a need for achievement. Therefore, highly competitive with a strong work ethic.

Source: Adapted from Greenbank (2006c, Table 1, p. 641).

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[6] The literature review underpinning this chapter is based on a wide range of sources (it for example includes references from sociology, education and cultural studies). These sources utilise empirical research and theoretical perspectives that may not be directly related to working class undergraduates, but the working class generally or other sections of the working class (e.g. young people, parents, small business owner-managers, etc.). Nevertheless, the 'working class values' that emerge from this literature review are going to be used as a conceptual framework within which to analyse the data from our interviews. By interviewing students from working class backgrounds this study aims to find out if these final year undergraduates possess these values.

This chapter will examine the students' career decision-making in the context of these three sets of values.

RATIONAL APPROACHES

As discussed in Chapter 1, a rational approach to career decision-making - involving the collection and evaluation of information - is often advocated as a means of maximising career opportunities. The pivotal role of information about the career opportunities available is also highlighted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) who argue that students need skills in 'gathering, evaluating and applying such information in order to manage their careers' (OECD, 2004, p. 84). A rational approach emphasises the need to systematically gather as much information as possible about careers, employers and jobs from 'formal' sources such as university careers centres, careers fairs and relevant websites. It also highlights the desirability of seeking expert advice during the decision-making process. As Hodkinson (1998, p. 302) argues:

> The inevitable focus of decision making, when seen from this perspective, is the making of a "correct" career decision ... From this point of view, careers education and guidance are essential to increase the chances of such a correct decision, mainly by providing better information and giving help in how to make a decision.

Yet, whilst the middle class value a rational approach to decision-making, it is argued that the working class do not share this 'competency value' (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Hutchings, 2003; Skeggs, 2004). According to Ball and Vincent (1998), the working class prefer 'hot' (i.e. informal information from people they know) rather than formal ('cold') information from what we might term 'official' or 'expert' sources. Similarly, Greenbank (2006c) found that small business owner-managers from working class backgrounds favoured informal information and intuition to the formalised business planning approach advocated by business consultants and banks.

It is suggested that the working classes preference for informal information arises because they are less familiar with using formal sources of information (OECD, 2004; Greenbank, 2006c). Therefore, it is said to occur because the working class do not know how to access formal information rather than because the do not value it. Yet it could be argued that undergraduates from working class backgrounds, who have been inculcated into rational approaches through the educational system, do have the capacity to adopt more rational approaches to career decision-making. Indeed, a number of students in this study said they were gathering information from more formal sources about possible career options and graduate employers. However, many of these students also admitted that they had undertaken a less than rigorous examination of different sources of careers information. For example, an information systems student said: 'I do keep looking on the internet, at least once a month maybe. I look at the police, the Merseyside Police, website to see if they've got any vacancies'. Similarly, a sports studies student indicates he is not very thorough or systematic: 'When I go on the websites I just look at like job vacancies and just look to see if there's anything that relates to me or relates to my degree'.

The evidence suggests that the students are adopting such approaches because of pressure of time and a lack of commitment to the career decision-making process. It is, however, possible that some students do not know how to gather and evaluate information in a systematic way.

The students also demonstrate a reluctance to utilise the advice of careers advisers (see Chapter 4) or use the resources housed in the careers centre. This last factor may be indicative of a more general trend, rather than a characteristic particular to students from working class backgrounds. Ng and Burke's (2006) Canadian study found students were generally making extensive use of the internet in the job search process. As already discussed our 'wash n' go' students (Redmond, 2006) are likely to favour this approach because of a reluctance to spend time in the university.

A number of students also indicate that they do not have complete faith or 'trust' in formal sources of information. Nobody in the study said they did not trust the impartiality of careers advisers, but one law student doubted that they would have the necessary expertise to help her:

> I don't suppose they would have information on like what would be involved in doing certain paths. I just don't think they would have anything that would like help. It's a very specialist subject - like would they know the eventual outcome if I did say mergers and acquisitions in my LPC [legal practice course]? Would it be easy to get a job in a company that way and stuff like that?

A few students also said they could not relate what they read in the careers literature to their own situation. For example, one student said he had 'seen facts and figures about how many people are going for jobs and how many jobs there actually are', but he did not appreciate it until: 'I went for jobs and experienced it - it's a lot harder than I thought'.

The students, therefore, preferred to rely on their own experiences and those of the people they know (i.e. 'hot' information). This was seen as a more concrete and valuable source of information. For example, a student described how labouring for his father - who is a self-employed carpet fitter - and undertaking office work in a temporary job for the local council, enabled him to decide that his future career should not involve manual or office-based work (he plans to manage a pub/restaurant). Another student recounted how watching her boyfriend set up and run his own business convinced her that she should consider self-employment as a career option:

> My boyfriend started up last year and I never ever thought he would be able to do it. He's doing gardening and he's doing really well. I'm now looking at him and thinking hell he's got a business. I mean he's a bit dizzy, but he's good at what he does. But he's not got a business mind. So I'm thinking well I HAVE, so I think I could do that now, definitely.

As Bowman *et al.* (2005) argue students are continually learning through direct and vicarious experience. Therefore, students do not learn about themselves and possible career options in the way envisaged by rational approaches such as Law and Watts' 'DOTS analysis', but in a process that is piecemeal, unpredictable and often dependent on chance encounters (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Bright *et al.*, 2005). As Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000, p. 589) argue 'learning is ubiquitous in ongoing activity. It is a participatory act – a profound social and cultural phenomenon, not simply a cognitive process'. As a result the students can undergo shifts in career direction because of what Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) refer to as 'turning points'.

The students in this study often referred to such turning points. For example, one student who 'always thought about going into the accountancy field' found, when she studied it at Edge Hill, that 'certain parts … BORE you to death'. As a result she is now considering other possible career paths. Another student described how she had a chance discussion with a teacher she admired and regarded as a role model. He had become disillusioned with teaching and advised her not to go into the profession and because she respected his opinion she abandoned her ambition to go into teaching. However, this student may already have been having doubts about entering the teaching profession. As Hodkinson (1998) points out students combine advice from third parties with their experiences (actual or vicarious) to make career decisions.

The students in Hodkinson's (1998) study were also willing to reject advice or information that was at variance with their view of the world or themselves. As Hodkinson (1998, p. 304) states:

> The reason why some young people vehemently reject careers advice is that what is being said to them does not fit with their existing schematic view of themselves or their perceptions of appropriate careers opportunities.

In this study, for example, one student described the careers advice she received at the college she attended as 'silly' and there was 'no way' she was going to accept the advice she was given. She also rejected the results of an on-line questionnaire that provided guidance on appropriate careers because 'the jobs it gave me didn't really appeal to me because they were like BORING routine everyday things'.

Another student, who plans to get married soon after graduation was not impressed with the advice provided by her personal tutor:

> She didn't really listen to what I said. I told her what I wanted and the stage that I was at in my life but she wasn't really having none of it. Oh why don't you be a teacher? Why don't you go abroad? Why don't you do this? You're only twenty-three, you don't want to be settling down. And she wasn't helping me with what I want to do. She was going off on something else persuading me to go down another path which I don't want to go down.

The students, therefore, make judgements about the validity and appropriateness of the advice they receive. Whether the students are knowledgeable enough to effectively evaluate advice is of course an important question. Raising such issues can lead to accusations of adopting a 'deficit model'. However, a lack of formal information gathering, combined with little tradition of higher education amongst the students' family and friends, does seem to have resulted in knowledge gaps and misunderstandings about the university sector and the graduate labour market amongst the students in this study.

This research has, for example, already identified the students' lack of awareness of the need to develop their employability. In addition, a number of students wrongly assume that their degrees tie them to particular careers.[7] For example, a marketing student believed she had to complete another degree in public relations to enter that particular field of work. Similarly, a law student was not aware that her degree is relevant to careers outside the

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[7] Knight and York (2003, p. 88) argue, 'Many [employers] are indifferent to students' first degree subject' (Purcell and Pitcher 1996)'. Similarly, Pool and Sewell (2007) citing Graduate Prospects state that two-thirds of graduates' jobs require no particular degree subject.

legal profession. She said, 'I never thought you could use it for anything else, it never crossed my mind'. This lack of understanding can have other knock-on implications. For instance, an information systems student did not want to admit to a careers adviser that he was no longer interested in a career in computing. He said 'You do sort of feel a bit pressured to say you're interested in something to do with computing'. As a result the student spent half-an-hour being advised about a career he was no longer interested in.

The students also lacked an understanding of the hierarchical nature of HE and the implications of attending a lower status university such as Edge Hill. In fact the students in this research exhibited a much poorer appreciation of the different types of university that exist than the participants in Archer's (2003) study. There was an awareness of the prestige attached to Oxford and Cambridge (and for sports students, Loughborough), but beyond these there was little appreciation of the status attached to different universities.

Also, despite many students being conscious of differences emerging between themselves and friends and relatives who had not gone to university (see Chapter 4), the students demonstrated little awareness of social class and the importance of cultural capital. Furlong and Cartmel (2005) suggest that there is a reticence to refer to social class as a potential barrier in the graduate labour market. They argue that students prefer to 'focus on more subtle indicators of class … such as accent and area of residence' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2005, p. 18). However, the impression we gained from our interviews is that there is little awareness of the issue of social class beyond the notion that there are a few privileged people from the 'upper class' who tend to attend Oxford and Cambridge. The students in this study therefore had an understanding of the nature of the class system and higher education that focused on extremes. As such, they failed to appreciate the more subtle, but still important differences that exist. The predominantly middle class students in Brown and Hesketh's (2004) study were conscious of the advantages that their social class brought them; in contrast the working class students in this study had very little appreciation of the disadvantages they might face.

FUTURE ORIENTATION

In their discussion of higher education decision-making Robertson and Hillman (1997) contend that the working class lack a 'future orientation'. More generally, other writers argue that the working class are reluctant to defer gratification and therefore 'live for today' (Willis, 1977; Argyle, 1994; Marshall *et al*., 1997). For example, Argyle discusses how working class values consist of 'short-term goals, immediate gratification and fatalism' (pp. 238-239); whilst the young working class males in Willis's study prioritise the desire to enjoy themselves, even if this has a negative effect on their longer-term prospects. This is contrasted with the middle classes who are said to be willing to make sacrifices in order to secure benefits at a future date (Beynon, 1999; Skeggs, 2004; Shilling, 2004).

It is evident that the vast majority of students in this study are not consciously looking ahead and engaging in activities that will enhance their employability. In Chapter 3, for example, we saw that students are not engaging in extra-curricular activities. Yet this tends to arise because they are unaware of the importance of such activities rather than because they do not value preparing for the future. As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of students assume that a good degree and any type of work experience will be enough to secure graduate employment. A number of students also talked about how they would rely on their ability to project their personality at the interview stage of the recruitment and selection process.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) characterise students as falling somewhere on a continuum that ranges from 'players' who understand the requirements of graduate employers and know how to 'play the game' in order to obtain a competitive advantage over other students; and 'purists' who feel they can be successful by being themselves and behaving in a way that is unaffected. Thomas and Jones (2007) suggest that non-traditional students are less likely to adopt the characteristics of 'players'. This research provides support for this. As already stated, the students in this study have made little deliberate attempt to enhance their employability. They also said that for the selection process they would act naturally. Typical comments were:

I would just be myself and not try and put on any airs and graces.

I wouldn't go in and try and be posh or anything or try and hide my accent.

If they don't like you they don't like you, but I'm never going to betray my roots, I'm never going to betray ME. I'll be totally honest to myself.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) suggest that students from working class backgrounds may not have the cultural capital to operate effectively as players. Some of the students seem to be aware of this. For instance, one student said:

I wouldn't have a clue what they [employers] wanted. So you are probably better to just act yourself because you don't know what they're looking for and if you try and be something you're not you could have been what they are looking for.

This student was going to act naturally for pragmatic reasons. However, other students said they would adopt this approach because they thought it was morally the 'the right thing to do' or because they feared being 'found out'. For example, a marketing student said:

I would look at what they want but I would be completely honest. If they said have you done team work I would say I've done that before, BUT I'd say what I hadn't done and that. I think I would be honest because if you say you could do something and then you got the job and you couldn't do it you'd be in trouble.

It is also suggested that the working class are fatalistic and imbued with a sense of pessimism about the future (Willis, 1977; Argyle, 1994; Marshall *et al.*, 1997; Purcell *et al.*, 2002; Bourdieu, 2003). Purcell *et al.* (2002), for example, argue that disadvantaged students are used to feeling powerless and unable to influence the course of their lives.

According to Bourdieu (1979, pp. 180-183) this leads to a 'live for today' or 'hedonistic' philosophy:

> The hedonism which seizes day by day the rare satisfactions ("the good times") of the immediate present is the only philosophy conceivable to those who "have no future" and, in any case, little to expect from the future.

However, the students in this study do not believe they have no control over their future and the vast majority are optimistic about their prospects. They certainly did not feel the need to gain as much enjoyment as they could in the present because their prospects are dismal. Yet some of them are frustrated by the fact that their friends, who had chosen not to go to university and are now working, are currently earning substantially more than them. For example, an information systems student said:

> Sometimes I think I was stupid to do this [degree], because I've gone down this route and got myself into, you know, student loans and all that palaver, yet I'm still on a rubbish wage. Whereas they've left school gone into a factory and they're earning double what I'm earning and it gets on my nerves sometimes.

Students such as this have, nevertheless, remained on their degree programmes because they feel that, in the long-run, financial benefits will accrue from their studies. As a student commented about her friends who are not studying for a degree: 'They're more interested in day to day life whereas I'm thinking ahead'. She, like many of the students in this study, believes that she will ultimately earn more than her friends who did not go to university. For the vast majority of students this, however, remains an expectation based on a faith in the financial benefits of obtaining a degree rather than a well thought out career plan.

One of the main reasons the students do not appear to be very future orientated is that most have never had a clear idea about exactly what they ultimately want to do. At the point of entering post-compulsory education three-quarters of the students said that they had chosen

their courses with a career in mind. When they were choosing their degree subject the proportion increased even further. Yet many of the students only had a vague notion of what they wanted to do. For example, a business and management student admits that he 'never had a definite career in mind' but 'I chose business because it was something I could see myself possibly having a future career in'. Similarly, a marketing student said 'I had a rough idea what I wanted. I wanted to do something to do with business'.

Despite approaching the end of their degrees, a high proportion of students remain undecided about the career they want to pursue. As a result, a number of students talked about taking some time after their studies to reflect on their future. For example, one student said, 'I'm going to take a year out and just decide what I am going to do, what I can ACTUALLY do with my degree'. Another student was considering spending some time teaching English in Thailand. He said, 'I don't know it's just about finding myself really'. This student then admitted he was anxious about making the transition from education to work:

> Maybe I'm not ready for it, I might be a bit scared and nervous and that. It's like one day you're learning the next day you're teaching or working and earning. It's kind of scary really.

Similarly another student said:

> It's quite scary. I'm now in my third year and I've got to get a job. I'd like to be a student really for a little bit longer. My biggest fear at the moment is graduating and having to get a job.

The students lack of a future orientation did not therefore appear to arise because they wanted to live for today and had a fatalistic attitude to life. It seems that many of the working class students in this study have not decided upon a career path and are unaware of the need to develop their employability. This makes them appear to not value career planning.

61

ASPIRATION LEVELS

It is argued that the working class have lower aspiration levels than the middle class, and therefore in comparison to them they lack ambition (Marshall *et al.*, 1997; Roberts, 1999; Archer and Hutchings, 2000, Maguire, 2001, 2005; Walpole, 2003; Arulmani *et al.*, 2003; Opheim, 2007 citingVan de Werfhorst and Andersen, 2005). This view is reflected in HE widening participation policy where initiatives to increase working class entry into university are focused on raising aspiration levels (Greenbank, 2006a).

The lower aspiration levels of the working class are said to have their roots in the barriers they face because of their social position. As Rawls (2001) contends, 'we assess our prospects in life according to our place in society and we form our ends and purposes in the light of the means and opportunities we can realistically expect' (p. 56). Similarly, Bourdieu (2003, p. 75) argues:

> expectations and aspirations … are very unequally distributed … by virtue of the law that, through the dispositions of habitus (themselves adjusted, most of the time, to agents' positions) expectations tend universally to be roughly adapted to the objective chances.

Yet the students in this study have demonstrated that they are more aspirational than most of their working class peers by going to university (and reaching the final year of their degree). They have also lived and worked in a university habitus for nearly three years which should raise their aspirations and improve their confidence levels. For some students this appears to be the case. For example, a business and management student describes how the degree has given her the confidence to consider starting her own business:

> My aspirations have changed COMPLETELY. Like I said to you before about my exam results, they're like coming back better than what I thought. I never thought I was capable of that – but now I'm realising that I am. Like I've

learnt a lot from the degree, like I don't think I would ever have thought of starting up in business.

There is, however, some evidence to suggest that the aspirations of some non-traditional students might become too highly inflated. A study at London Metropolitan University reported that academic and careers staff found a number of non-traditional students had unrealistic expectations in terms of graduate salaries (Hills, 2003). In contrast, a study by Furlong and Cartmel (2005) found that disadvantaged students had lower wage expectations than their more advantaged peers. Furlong and Cartmel (2005) suggest that low wage aspirations arise amongst disadvantaged students because their wage expectations are influenced by low rates of pay in the communities within which they live.

The students in this research appeared to have realistic aspirations in terms of salary levels, with the majority expecting to earn between £15,000 and £20,000 per annum on graduation. Unlike the students in Furlong and Cartmel's study, the students tend to base their wage expectations on perceptions about graduate salaries which they obtain from various sources, e.g. the careers literature, talks by careers advisers, the media, discussions with other students, etc. Where students did refer to wages in the communities within which they lived and worked they are keen to point out how their graduate status will enable them to obtain a higher salary. For example, a student who is planning to teach physical education said:

If you look at people in factories - I'm not trying to put anyone down or something like that – but say they're on thirteen grand, after tax they're looking at ten. In PE you're looking at twenty, after tax say sixteen.

Another student referred to salaries in the call centre where she works during term-time as being between £10,000 and £12,000, but she feels she will be worth £14,000-£15,000 because of her graduate status. This student thought that graduate salaries were around £20,000, but was willing to accept significantly less. She is an example of a small number of students (four, all female) who seem to lack confidence. In two cases this lack of confidence appears to arise because of their poor academic performance. Yet the other two

students with low confidence levels are performing well on their degrees. For example, a business and management student is doing much better than she expected and hopes to obtain an upper-second class honours degree. However, she is not going to apply for graduate jobs because another student on her course, who she regards as very clever and articulate, has so far failed in his attempt to obtain a trainee management position. As she says: 'If anybody on our course would have had a chance I would have said he would, so I was thinking I haven't got a chance if he hasn't'.

Similarly, an information systems student, who expects to obtain a first class honours degree admitted she is afraid of applying for graduate jobs:

> I've been looking on the Guardian Online which seems to have loads of graduate jobs, but they look dead scary, so I always click off that. But I think they're the kind I SHOULD be applying for (pause) well obviously they are … When I look on the Guardian site I just think oh I could never do that, they won't want me.

This student has instead been applying (unsuccessfully) for what she describes as 'school leavers jobs'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The literature proposes that the working class value informal rather than formal information; lack a future orientation and have low aspiration levels. Yet the evidence from this study suggests that applying such generalisations to working class undergraduates is overly simplistic and likely to be misleading. There is, for example, evidence to indicate that the students in this study are adopting many of the middle class values identified in Table 5.2. This is perhaps not surprising because the working class undergraduates in this study are unlikely to be typical of their class. In contrast to most people from working class backgrounds they have been sufficiently aspirational to enter higher education. Moreover,

they should have been influenced by their exposure to the higher education environment or 'habitus'. This issue is considered in more depth in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The preceding three chapters have examined the influence of financial issues, networks and values on the students' career decision-making behaviour. In this final chapter we will identify the key features characterising the way the working class students in this study approached career decision-making and planning. This will provide the basis for discussing the implications for careers advice and education. The chapter will end by considering possible directions for further research.

KEY FEATURES OF CAREER DECISION-MAKING

In this study we identified three key weaknesses in the way students approached career decision-making: the students made limited use of professional careers advice; they did not evaluate a range of career options; and they made little attempt to improve their employability. Each of these will be considered in turn before we discuss the implications for careers advice and education.

Limited use of professional careers advice

The students are willing to utilise members of their network of family, friends and other contacts about issues relating to careers. They are, however, aware that many of the people they know have little or no knowledge of the graduate labour market and therefore do not approach them for guidance. This means that the working class students in this study often have limited access to advice. Despite this deficit in their social capital many of the

students do not seek help from careers advisers. One of the main reasons this seems to arise is because they have anxieties about approaching people they do not know. As a result, the students often spoke to their lecturers rather than specialist careers advisers. A number of students are also unaware of the type of advice the careers service are able to offer. The students' lack of social capital and their limited use of specialist professional advice seem to be important factors contributing to significant gaps in the students' knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market.

Limited evaluation of different of career options

The students are often considering only limited career options. There are three key reasons why this occurs. First, many of the students seem to turn to role models to steer them in the direction of particular careers, especially if they are uncertain and anxious about the type of career they should pursue. However, because the students operate within very restricted networks they are not exposed to a wide range of potential role models. This means options arising from this source of influence are inevitably limited. Second, there is a misconception amongst some students that they must pursue careers related to their degree subject. In this study, for example, an information systems student believed he had to apply for jobs in computing even though he no longer wished to pursue a career in this. Third, the students often adopt a less than comprehensive approach to career decision-making which means they do not generate potential career options through extensive formal information search activity. This seems to arise because the students are prioritising their studies, which means they have often made a conscious decision to delay a serious (or comprehensive) attempt to find a job until after they have graduated. In the meantime they are formulating ideas on the basis of informal (or 'hot') sources of information. Despite being inculcated into rational approaches through the educational system the students do, nevertheless, seem to have a high regard for personal experience and the experience of people they know.

Limited attempt to improve employability

The students in this study are making few conscious attempts improve their employability by engaging in activities that will develop skills, experience and other attributes relevant to their future careers. Yet this does not appear to be because the students lack a future

orientation or because they do not have the time to engage in non-remunerated activities. Instead, it seems to arise because the working class students in this study do not seem to be aware of the importance employers place on the ability of graduates to exhibit what Brown and Hesketh (2004) refer to as 'hard' and 'soft' currencies. As Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue:

> The self is a key economic resource, 'who you are' matters as much as 'what you know' in the market for managerial and professional work. Therefore, personal capital depends on a combination of *hard currencies* including, credentials, work experience, sporting and music achievements [which demonstrate drive and determination], etc. and *soft currencies*, including interpersonal skills, charisma, appearance and accent. (p. 35, italics in original)

As this study demonstrates the students tend to focus on obtaining a 'good' degree and often feel that this, along with some work experience, will be sufficient to obtain good graduate jobs. Whilst many of the students consider the experience they have gained from their term-time jobs to be important, very few are able to articulate how their skills and experience will be useful to graduate employers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREERS ADVICE AND EDUCATION

The type of approach to career decision-making identified above has led many commentators to argue for additional support to be targeted at 'disadvantaged' groups such as the working class (e.g. UUK, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Pollard *et al*., 2004; Barraket, 2004). There are, however, practical difficulties involved in identifying working class students (Morey *et al*., 2003). As we have discovered in the process of conducting this study, accurate and detailed information on the occupational status of parents/guardians is needed if students are going to be classified according to their social class. In practice, such information is difficult to obtain. Moreover, class remains a contested issue (Marshall *et al*.,

1997; Rose and O'Reilly, 1998) and there will inevitably be difficulties obtaining agreement about how to categorise students. The whole process of targeting is also exacerbated by the fact that social class remains an awkward topic to discuss. As Sayer (2002, p. 1) contends:

> Class is an embarrassing topic. 'What class are you?' or 'What class are they?' are not easy questions, particularly if those who are asked ponder the implications of their answers, or if the questioner is of a different class from the person being asked, and especially if there are others of different classes present who can hear the answer.

Problems such as these make the targeting of working class students difficult to put into practice. It is also argued by practitioners and those with managerial responsibility for careers, that targeting can stigmatise students (Morey *et al*., 2003; Greenbank, 2004). For example, a member of the senior management group in a college of higher education in Greenbank's (2004) study said:

> I believe you've got to put support on that is not labelled. This way we're not making students DIFFERENT. And there's a good reason for that, because the worst thing you can do is have a student turn round to you and say but why am I doing this when they don't have to? You CAN'T do that. Things are only acceptable if EVERYBODY has to do them. (p. 147)

Similarly, the pro-vice-chancellor of a university pointed out that: 'We're very very loathe specifically to flag up individuals as possibly being likely to need special support' (Greenbank, 2004, p. 147). Yet if careers education and advice is made available to everybody, the evidence suggests that the most advantaged students access it - which further compounds the degree of inequality between students (Brennan and Shah, 2003).

This problem can be overcome by introducing compulsory careers modules, preferably in the early stages of a degree programme. It would be expected that these would benefit

students from lower SEGs more than those from middle class backgrounds (see Warren, 2002; Greenbank, 2004; Thomas and Jones, 2007 for similar comments). A senior manager in a college of higher education interviewed by Greenbank (2004), for example, referred to the way they developed employability amongst their students through work placement projects and a module involving career planning. This was believed to be particularly beneficial to students from working class backgrounds because it was felt that they were more likely to lack the skills developed through these initiatives.

The evidence suggests that students would welcome more career related topics on their courses (White, 2006/07) and a better awareness of the nature of the labour market before they graduate (Hills, 2003). According to Glover (2002) improved employability is the main reason students attend university and Brown (2003) argues that these expectations will increasingly have to be met by universities. If we accept that careers education should be delivered through compulsory careers modules the key question is: how should these modules be delivered? This research suggests that the challenge is to obtain student commitment to careers education; the students need to critically evaluate their approach to career decision-making; and careers education and advice needs to ensure that account is taken of student values and the context within which they make career decisions. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Student commitment

Making careers modules compulsory means that all students will receive some careers education.[8] It does not, however, mean that students will always attend sessions or be committed to these modules. In order to encourage student commitment it would be helpful if careers modules are given a credit rating. The involvement of academic staff alongside those from careers would also improve the status of such modules with students. According to Brennan and Shah (2003) there is a feeling amongst student services that academic departments should have more involvement in careers education. When discussing the

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[8] The Careers Centre at Edge Hill University also found that the number of careers interviews increased in those subjects where mandatory career planning modules were introduced. Moreover, the students would often ask for the careers adviser who had delivered the module.

provision of careers education for master's level students Bowman *et al.* (2005) suggest that a critical engagement with employment issues would give careers modules greater academic credibility. We would contend that this is also the case for undergraduate modules. If they are academically rigorous this will make them more acceptable to academics. This is important because student commitment is likely to be higher if they believe that the academic staff in their department value careers education. A critical approach would also encourage students to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and develop new practices. As Knight (2002, p. 35) argues:

> Acts of deconstructing why things are as they are and why it seems normal for them to be so may initiate new learning (because we may see things afresh) or may lead us to consider practices that had hitherto seemed inappropriate.

A number of students in this study also indicated that whilst they attended careers workshops and read careers literature they often rejected such information because they had difficulty relating it to their own situation. Hutchings (2003) suggests that 'information needs to be provided in a way that makes it 'hot' knowledge, that is trusted and valued' (p. 116). According to Bowman *et al.* (2005) this can be achieved by bringing in graduate employees to get key points across (such as the need to develop employability). It is argued that graduate employees are more likely to be listened to than employers, careers advisers or lecturers. Graduates can also provide useful role models to students. There are, however, potential risks attached to this approach. Hutchings (2003), for example, describes how similar initiatives in schools have received a negative response from pupils who felt that the role models were promoting career paths that are unattainable. As Bourdieu (2003) argues, people are able to differentiate between opportunities that are achievable and those that are not.

Lessons can be learned from schemes to encourage entrepreneurialism. In this situation it was found that role models are more successful when students can 'identify with them, where they came from and how they were successful' (Deakins, 1999, p. 54). This was

demonstrated in this study when students indicated that they were able to relate to role models who came from similar backgrounds to themselves. It is therefore probably also important for role models to have been to the same, or at least a similar type of university, to the students they are talking to.

It can of course be difficult to find appropriate role models who are willing to visit universities. The other problem is that universities are only likely to be able to provide a small number of role models. One of the issues identified in this study is that working class students have access to a limited number of role models and this restricts the career options they consider. It may therefore be helpful for universities to also provide the students with case studies (written and on film) based on the experience of their own graduates.

Approaches to career decision-making

This study also identified a number of weaknesses in the way students engaged in the career decision-making process. For instance, there was often what Bazerman (2006, p. 40) refers to as 'insensitivity to sample size' in the way students generalised from a single experience or the experience of one or two other people. In this research, for example, a student recounted how she abandoned the idea of going into teaching because one person advised her not to enter the profession. It would have been sensible for this student to increase the sample size by eliciting the views of others and/or seeking the advice of a careers adviser. If the students have undertaken compulsory careers modules with input from careers advisers they will know them and hopefully find it easier to approach them for advice. It would also be helpful if careers advisers are able to develop a long-term relationship with courses so that students have a familiar face to turn to for one-to-one support.

We have already seen that students are suspicious of formal ('cold') information from sources such as the university careers service and websites. In contrast, students seemed to trust their own direct experience and the experience of others. However, the students need to be aware of potential biases in the 'hot' information they obtain from these sources. For example, a student may be fortunate enough to obtain a work placement relevant to their

career ambitions. There is, however, a danger that this students will fall into what Bazerman (2006, p. 35) refers to as the 'confirmation trap'. This means they will focus on aspects of their placement that reinforce their positive attitude and ignore those facets that do not.

When listening to the experience of other people students also need to be aware of potential biases in the information they receive. The perspectives provided by others will reflect how they feel about a job at that particular point in time. Earl (1990), for example, has shown that people tend to base their opinions on their most recent experiences. What they say may also be influenced by the nature of the relationship between them and the student. For instance, they may feel the need to portray a positive picture in order to demonstrate that they have been successful.

The use of informal sources of information is also associated with more intuitive forms of decision-making. Kirzner (1979) contends that whilst individuals may not necessarily actively search for information, they naturally absorb it from the situations they experience. It is argued that experienced decision-makers are able to store this information and then by-pass conscious analysis to make intuitive decisions (Adair, 1985; Simon, 1987; Henry, 2001). There is evidence to suggest that for very complex decisions the process of intuition may be more effective than rational approaches (Claxton, 2006 citing Dijksterhuis, 2003). Indeed, there are drawbacks with rational approaches because individuals are restricted or 'bounded' in their ability to consciously collect and process all the data available for decision-making (Simon, 1957; Claxton, 2006). 'Bounded rationality' is very relevant to career decision-making because of the amount of information available. However, the use of intuition also has its drawbacks. Research suggests it is more successful when it is utilised by well informed decision-makers drawing upon extensive experience (Simon, 1987; Henry, 2001; Phillips *et al*., 2004). Yet the students in this research have little or no previous experience of career decision-making or the graduate labour market to draw upon. As a result, their intuition is likely to be based on their 'feelings' and the biases associated with this (see Bolte *et al*., 2003), rather than extensive sources of unconsciously absorbed information.

There is also a tendency for students in this study to view their approach to career decision-making and planning as 'correct' because they are behaving in the same way as everybody else. For example, one student said: 'None of my friends have ever been to careers, so maybe I just thought there's been no reason to'. The tendency for people to adopt imitative behaviour, or follow group norms, has a powerful influence on decision-making behaviour (Harrison, 1999). It can be argued that imitative behaviour is a useful strategy when it involves copying successful decisions (Greenbank, 1999). However, in this situation the students are duplicating the behaviour of their peers without knowing the consequences of their actions.

There are therefore a range of potential weaknesses and biases in the way students are approaching career decision-making. Indeed, the students are likely to have many more deficiencies in their decision-making than have been identified above. The students should be made aware of these and encouraged to critically evaluate the way they make decisions. A substantial amount of research has been carried out into how the decision-making behaviour of individuals can be improved (see for example Thompson *et al.*, 2000; Loewenstein *et al.*, 2003; Bazerman, 2006) and we believe this research can be applied to career decision-making.

These studies focus on the need to encourage people to question or 'unfreeze' (Lewin, 1999, p. 282) the way they currently make decisions and then consider (and put into practice) alternative approaches (see Burnes, 1998, 2000; Bazerman, 2006). In effect, what they are attempting to do is encourage participants to reprogramme their decision-making behaviour. This is achieved through the use of practical exercises and case studies. It is also suggested that if participants compare cases with 'different surface features' (Thompson *et al.*, 2000, p. 63) and identify commonalities between them – a process referred to as 'analogical encoding' (Loewenstein *et al.*, 2003) - this enables them to develop more effective decision-making strategies. We would advocate the use of such methods to help students improve their career decision-making. These case studies and exercises could also

help students to develop decision-making skills that are relevant to other aspects of their lives.

Working in groups can also facilitate this process by providing different perspectives and therefore improved opportunities for identifying parallels between cases (Thompson *et al*., 2000; Loewenstein *et al*., 2003). In this research we also found the students are influenced by the normative behaviour of their peers. This indicates that there may be benefits to classroom activities which aim to change the behaviour of groups of students and not just individuals. Similarly, Lewin (1999) argues that a number of studies (including some carried out by himself) suggest that individuals are more likely to change in a group setting than in one-to-one situations.

Student values and the context within which they make career decisions
Although the students in this study can be defined as 'working class' we have seen that the economic, social and cultural context within which they make decisions, and the values the students possess, can vary significantly. This heterogeneity is not surprising given the existence of what we have referred to as ambiguities in their social class (see Chapter 4). There are also different 'ways of growing up and being working class' (Reay, 1997, p. 22). In this study, for example, the students' parents seemed to vary significantly in the extent to which they attempt to inculcate ambition in their children. Furthermore, whilst students might come from a family background that is working class, they also occupy other (sometimes more middle class) habituses through their term-time employment, outside interests, and most importantly, their attendance at university.

As students experience different situations their values may begin to change. It is, however, suggested that core values are not easily altered (Kember, 2001 citing Rokeach, 1968). For example, Alford (1998) contends that students living at home retain the cultural values of the communities within which they live. Yet other writers characterise career decision-making as a learning process with new experiences shaping students perceptions and beliefs (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Bowman *et al*., 2005; Opheim, 2007). It is, nevertheless, emphasised that students filter new experiences through existing perspectives (Hodkinson

and Sparkes, 1997). This therefore limits the extent to which values will change. It does not, however, mean that values do not change at all. As we have seen the work of Lewin (1999), Thompson *et al.* (2000), Loewenstein *et al.* (2003) and Bazerman (2006) suggests that change can occur. There is also evidence in this study of students changing their values. For example, a number of students described how attending university had led to their values diverging from those of their family and friends. As such, the engagement of working class students in different situations does seem to provide them with the opportunity to inculcate different values.

Although the students in this study ostensibly come from similar social backgrounds, they have values and make decisions in contexts that can vary significantly. We would therefore agree with Bimrose *et al.*'s (2005) conclusion that careers professionals need to understand the circumstances and needs of individual students. Therefore, rather than promoting a particular decision-making approach, careers education and advice should try and encourage students to reflect critically on their values and how they undertake career decision-making and planning. Whether they decide to change should be left to them. For example, careers advice is often based on the assumption that students should start applying for jobs whilst they are studying so that they have a job to go to once they graduate. However, many students prefer to focus on their studies and then apply for jobs in the year following graduation. In the meantime they often continue in their term-time jobs. There may be quite rational reasons for adopting this approach. Careers education and advice should of course encourage students to critically evaluate whether or not this is the right strategy for them to adopt. If, however, they decide it is, their decision should be respected and the university careers service should work with the students to make this strategy successful.

CONCLUSION

The main problem confronting working class students in this study is their lack of knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market. This largely arises because of

limitations in their social capital and their reluctance to compensate for this by seeking professional careers advice. As Hodkinson (1998), however, points out solutions that simply emphasise the need for better information and advice are 'naïve and probably doomed to failure' (p. 306). Therefore, activity based approaches using exercises and case studies which focus on the process of making career decisions are advocated. These should aim to encourage students to challenge their own values. Moreover, even though these activities take place in groups, students can still decide for themselves how they wish to approach career decision-making. As such, a student centred approach to careers education which focuses on how the individual can improve the way they approach the process of career decision-making and planning is advocated. The comments Bowman *et al.* (2005) make about postgraduate careers are relevant to undergraduates. They argue that careers advice should be student centred and concerned with 'their personal circumstances, values and aspirations' (Bowman *et al.*, 2005, p. 105).

This research has on many occasions challenged existing theories about the way working class students approach career decision-making. The study is, nevertheless, only based on a relatively small sample at one university. It would therefore be useful if this research could be extended to include students from other universities and from a greater range of socio-economic groups. This would enable the values, circumstances and behaviour of different types of student to be compared. We suspect that students from more middle class backgrounds will have a greater understanding of the graduate labour market because they have access to a network of family and friends who are more knowledgeable. This will be reflected in the way they approach career decision-making and planning. However, we also expect that there will again be significant differences between these students, with some middle class students demonstrating significant flaws in the way they undertake career decision-making. If this is the case, a student centred approach that focuses on encouraging students to critically evaluate their approach will benefit these students as well as those from working class backgrounds.

The ideas introduced in this research study are very general and at this stage quite abstract. In the next stage of this research these ideas will be incorporated into careers advice and

education at Edge Hill University. This will be evaluated using an action research approach and the findings published in a second report to HECSU.

Back to contents

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

FIRST STAGE QUESTIONNAIRE

Edge Hill University

<u>Questionnaire: Career Decision-making</u>

This questionnaire is the first stage of a study into the process final year students go through when looking for a job. The answers you provide will be confidential and in the work that results from this research nobody will be able to identify individuals. At the end of this short questionnaire you will be asked whether you want to participate in the next stage of the study. This will involve an interview with either Sue Hepworth (Senior Careers Adviser) or Paul Greenbank (Senior Lecturer in Management). The interviews will take place at Edge Hill and you will be paid expenses of £20.

1. Degrees studying ……………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………..

2. Year of study ………………

3. Gender (Please tick)

Male ☐

Female ☐

4. Date of birth ……………………………..

5. Do you currently live at home with your parents/guardians during term-time? (Please tick)

Yes ☐

No ☐

The information from this questionnaire will be used solely for the purpose of this research.

6. During your time at Edge Hill have you ever visited the careers centre?
(Please tick)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

If you wish to comment please do so:

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

7. During your time at Edge Hill have you ever had an interview with a careers
adviser? (Please tick)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

If you wish to comment please do so:

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

8. Does one or more of your parents/step-parents/guardians have a degree?
(Please tick)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't know ☐

If you wish to comment please do so:

…………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………….

9. If you are under 28 please give the occupation of your parent, step-parent or guardian who earns the most. If she or he is retired or unemployed, give their most recent occupation. If you are 28 or over, please give your last full-time occupation prior to coming to Edge Hill.

…………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………

10. After graduation do you intend to:
(Please tick)

Work ☐

Stay in full-time education ☐

Other ☐ Please specify …………………………………………

…………………………………………

11. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your career decision-making? This interview should take between half-an-hour and an hour. Those selected will be offered a payment of £20 to cover expenses.

(Please tick)

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, could you please let us know the following information:

Name …………………………………………………………………………

Student number…………………………………………………………………..

Home telephone number   ………………….. ………………………….

Mobile number ………………………………………………………

E-mail address ………………………………………………………….

What is the best way to contact you?

……………………………………………………………………………

What is the most convenient time to contact you?

……………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………….

Thank-you for completing this questionnaire, your help is much appreciated.

APPENDIX II

SECOND STAGE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide: Student Career Decision-making

Details of interviewee (to be complete prior to interview)

Interview code ………………………………

Date of interview ………………………………………………………..

Time of interview ………………………………………………………..

Place of interview ………………………………………………………..

Student's name ……………………………………………………………………….

Introductory statement

1. Could I thank you for giving up your time for this interview. Your help in this research is much appreciated.

2. The answers you provide will be confidential. In the work that results from this research individuals will not be identified by name.

3. Could I stress there are no right and wrong answers. We are just interested in how students go about finding a job.

4. I will tape the interview as this will cut down the time the interview takes and will also ensure I have an accurate record of what you say. I hope that is OK.

Student's current situation

1. How is your degree going?

- Workload
- Results
- What do you hope to achieve in terms of degree classification?

2. Do you have a part-time job?

- If yes, what do you do?
- Hours worked?

Student's background

3. Could you tell me what you have done since you left school?

- Start with choice of GCSEs

- College

- University (choice of degree, option choices, etc.)

- Hobbies, interests, etc.

- Jobs/work experience

-Anything you have done that you feel will stand you in good stead?

4. What do your family and friends do? (In terms of their job/or are they in education?).

- Start with family members (parents, brothers/sisters, significant others)

- Focus on occupation of parent/guardian who earns the most

- Close friends

Job search/decision-making process

5. If you could do any job what would you hope to do?

- Why?

6. Is this what you ultimately hope to do?

- Probe: if not, why not? If yes, confidence of achieving it?

7. Have your career aspirations changed since coming to Edge Hill?

-If yes, why?

8. Tell me what you've done so far (if anything) about getting a job?

[Discuss what student has done or plans to do (and why?)]

- Level of success?

- Sources of advice (formal/informal)

- Aspirations: salary

- Geographical location

- Awareness of nature of labour market

9. Looking at the other students at Edge Hill - do you think you have any advantages or disadvantages compared to them?

10. How do you think you will fare against students from other universities?

- Local universities (e.g. UCLAN, Lancaster, JMU, Liverpool)

- Universities from further afield (e.g. Exeter, Durham, Cambridge)

11. If you had your time at school, college and university over again would you do anything differently?

Thank-you for giving up your time to be interviewed.

Interviewer's notes and comments

Comment on the interviewee's level of interest and manner

Any other comments?

Back to contents

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