

IAG Provision and Higher Education

A paper prepared for the DfES review of IAG on behalf of CeGS & NICEC

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1. Context

In 1997, Dearing¹ recommended that institutions of higher education should 'over the medium term, integrate their services more fully into academic affairs' and that 'the Government, in the medium and long term, should integrate careers advice for lifelong learning, to complement services based inside higher education institutions. The Government's response stated that it 'will be addressing, with interested parties, the scope for closer working links between careers services within and outside higher education'.

The dynamic and rapidly changing context of higher education² has ensured that a wide range of factors influence the career-related behaviour of prospective students, students and graduates. Implications for the need to deliver efficient, effective and economical careers education, information and advice services within higher education are profound³, with a modernising agenda identified⁴ and quality assurance of services prioritised⁵.

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)⁶ has identified a succession of public policy imperatives, statutory obligations and guidelines for HE institutions on 'employability' that have emerged recently, which include: -

- HEFCE performance indicators for the employment outcomes of graduates; also institutional audits analyse how each university measures up to the benchmarks for employability, and whether procedures to address this are integrated into the curriculum.

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¹ Dearing, R. (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society. [Online] Available: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

² Department for Education and Skills (2003). *The Future of Higher Education*. London: The Stationery Office Ltd. Cm 5735.

³ Harris, M. (2001). *Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications.

⁴ Universities UK (2002). *Modernising HE careers education: a framework for good practice*. London: Universities UK.

⁵ Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Delivering Quality: Quality assurance and delivery of careers education, information and guidance for learning and work within higher education*. Sheffield: DfES.

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⁶ AGCAS Consultation Paper on 'Benchmarks for Careers Education' - June 2005

- The new fees environment and widening participation agenda which require that HEIs should demonstrably provide value for money that will often be judged by enhanced skills and employability outcomes.
- Personal Development Planning (PDP) requirements, which oblige HEIs to offer opportunities to all undergraduates for holistic development and recording of achievement that will be of value to the individual, to employers and to society. Many HEIs have now begun to see careers education as a vehicle for PDP, and to acknowledge that students will best engage with this if it is an accredited and assessed part of the curriculum.
- HEFCE's Centres of Excellence initiative (2005), which has led to the creation of several national centres remitted to promote employability through teaching and learning..

2. Career interventions that support students and graduates

A recent literature review of evidence regarding curricular and extra-curricular interventions which assist students and graduates to make career-related decisions and progress towards entry into the labour market found that this area has been well researched.⁸ Six themes were identified, relating both to pre-course and on-course guidance. Specifically, these were: pre-entry interventions; career-related interventions; curricular interventions to support vocational trajectories; curricular-related interventions; extra-curricular interventions; and multicultural interventions. For specialist career interventions, evaluations were generally positive (i.e. courses, modules, computer programs, one-to-one interviews and e-guidance), though the evidence relating to the efficacy of these interventions is limited.

Pre-entry guidance

A range of career-related initiatives have been used to promote higher education for under-represented groups. For example, a pilot study, which demonstrated how support from local undergraduate medical and dental students, as part of a structured school/college based programme, resulted in an increase of academically able students from (socio-economically) underprivileged educational backgrounds progressing to study medicine and dentistry.⁹ One other study found that students who were provided with financial assistance as part of a structured careers programme to pursue a medical education successfully completed their courses. Differences in learning and career progression were noted between students from high and low socio-economic groups (classified by parental income)¹⁰ and this study concluded that financial concerns influenced students' career choice. Finally, a pre-entry intervention led participants through a discussion of their vocational interests which supported subject choice and occupational choices. This was found to be successful in helping career undecided women identify the barriers to their career decision-making¹¹ (Tinsley *et al.*, 2002). T

⁷ [Insert CETL weblink](#)

⁸ Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.A. & Brown, J. (in press) *A Systematic Literature Review of Research into Career-related Interventions for Higher Education*, Manchester: HECSU

⁹ Kamali, A.W., Nicholson, S. and Wood, D.F. (2000). *A model for widening access into medicine and dentistry: the SAMDA-BL project*. *Medical Education* 39(9): 918-925.

¹⁰ Cooter, R., Erdmann, J.B., Gonnella, J.S., Callahan, C.A., Hojat, M. and Xu, G. (2004). *Economic diversity in medical education: The relationship between students' family income and academic performance, career choice, and student debt*. *Evaluation and the Health Professions* 27(3):252-264.

¹¹ Tinsley, H.E.A., Tinsley, D.J. and Rushing, J. (2002). *Psychological type, decision-making style, and reactions to structured career interventions*. *Journal of Career Assessment* 10(2):258-280.

In addition to these types of targeted pre-entry guidance interventions, some HEIs (for example, University of Derby) have extended their general service offer to include further education students.

On-course guidance

Careers services for students in higher education are well-established across universities and degree-awarding colleges in the UK. Typically, they comprise specialist units staffed by qualified professional careers advisers, with differing levels of involvement from academic departments. They often operate alongside student service 'units', offering a wide range of ancillary and support services covering, for example, health, welfare and housing. Higher education careers services offer a range of services. For example, one university careers service website publishes 'a comprehensive range of services to undergraduates and post-graduates, including face-to-face interviews; access to on-line resources and a vacancy database; a programme of events (e.g. careers fairs); practice selection and assessment tests and information about graduate first destinations'.

In addition, Universities are increasingly developing career management skills as part of the curriculum. Approaches to embedding career education and management skills throughout the higher education curriculum can be identified along a continuum of those that are discrete and those that are integrated, as follows:



An example of a discrete curriculum location might be a stand-a-lone, compulsory, generic careers module. An example of a wholly integrated location might be where careers learning outcomes are achieved through a discipline's subject matter, perhaps occurring in several places throughout a programme. Few programmes are wholly discrete or wholly integrated and both types are embedded, by virtue of being part of the curriculum.

Currently there are significant variations in curricula such as:

- Size (careers modules typically range from five to twenty credits)
- Location (often in the second year, but the first and final years are also used)
- Name (e.g. career management skills, professional skills, placement preparation)
- Choice (some are university wide electives, many however, are compulsory).

Post-course guidance

Employability is increasingly seen as a key performance indicator by higher education institutes. HESA¹² has undertaken a fundamental review of the collection of information about the destinations of leavers from higher education (DeLHE). New arrangements were introduced in December 2003 which require all universities to provide a six-month early survey of all qualifiers (used to produce institutional performance indicators), supplemented by a follow-up survey of a sample of leavers after a further two years. HESA indicates that research findings show that information about graduate employment six months after graduation is a good predictor of future employment patterns and consequently can be used as a measure of institutional performance. Services designed to support transition into the labour market are consequently well developed and include careers fairs, preparation for selection, access to range of vacancy sources and computer aided guidance designed for various purposes.

¹² Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA): For more detailed information on the guidelines for 'Destinations of Leavers from HE' visit - http://www.hesa.ac.uk/circulars/fds/2002/02_03.htm

Once students have completed their courses, guidance provision varies according to the awarding institution and the region of the country where the student is resident. As students are increasingly delaying career decision-making and taking longer to establish themselves in their careers¹³, a gap in provision is evident at this stage of the graduate career. A mutual aid scheme once existed, where students were entitled to visit careers services at institutions nearest to their residence. However, more recently, significant variations in practice have developed, with students not uncommonly being left without any HE careers service support at this crucial stage in their career development.

3. Existing tensions

A review of guidance and counselling for higher education, commissioned by the Council of Europe¹⁴ highlighted a number of tensions in provision in the three phases of service provision, specifically: pre-entry, on-course and post-course. These comprised: existing variation across the University sector because of different levels of resources; guidance which is delivered by those with no power to admit students compared to that offered by those who have the power to admit but have less interest in guidance; guidance being more easily accessible by those who need it less; and a lack of integration of available services.

- ***Variations in provision***

The resource bases of different University careers services will reflect not only the financial health of the institution, but the priority attached by senior management to information, advice and guidance. One indicator is the staffing levels available in different services. Variations identified in recent research across just ten universities¹⁵, revealed a range in the staffing levels between one service that employed over seventy careers staff compared with one other service with less than six. The staff: student ratio will, therefore, be one important determinant of services available. Another will be the level of demand for services from students. (Feedback to one University head of careers service during a Matrix accreditation process was that it was 'a victim of its own success', since it had marketed itself so successfully that demand for services exceeded its ability to deliver efficiently).

- ***Admissions or guidance?***

Careers services within Universities were originally intended to help graduates secure employment at the point of exit, rather than secure entry to courses. One consequence is that careers specialists employed by University services tend not to be involved in admissions to courses, nor to have the authority to make offers. The power of admissions remains with admissions tutors, who are unlikely to have had career guidance training and in many cases, their role is primarily grounded in 'marketing' and/or 'student admissions'. In Universities and/or for courses where active recruitment is necessary to attract students (rather than a process of selection of the 'best candidates') there may well be an expectation placed on careers staff to assist with recruitment (for example, one University

¹³ Purcell, K., Elias, P., Davies, R. & Wilton, N. (2005) The Class of '99: a study of early labour market experiences of recent graduates', DfES Research Report No. 691. DfES/esru/IER. Available [Online]: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/news/classof99fullreport.pdf>.

¹⁴ Bimrose, J. (1996) *Guidance & Counselling for Higher Education*, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Council of Europe/UCAS

¹⁵ Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.A., Hughes, D. & Orton, M. (2004) *What is Effective Guidance? Evidence from Longitudinal Case Studies in England*, DfES/Warwick Institute for Employment Research. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/bydate/egr2004.pdf>

careers adviser recently reported that her institution expected careers advisers to attend careers fairs for school pupils for the purpose of recruiting students to under-subscribed courses).

- **Gaps in service provision**

There is a problem for students who discontinue or drop out of courses. Whilst University careers staff may be able to offer guidance support to the individual as they are coming to their decision to discontinue, once they have left the institution, the ability to continue to support these clients will vary¹⁶. Data from a survey of higher education careers advisory services (2005) found that while all offered free services to their current students, many restricted their services to their own graduates¹⁷. The 'drop-out' is, therefore, in danger of falling into the gap between services provided free by higher education careers advisers and services outside Universities which often operate eligibility criteria for services which may exclude individuals qualified at level 3 and above.

Similarly, there are gaps in provision for the students who successfully complete their higher education courses. Some Universities continue to offer support to their graduates for up to two years after completion and some support students from other Universities who have re-located to an area nearby. However, this provision is not consistent and some services are charged. For example, the University of London Careers Group has recently implemented a fee structure for certain aspects of its services, within a market led approach¹⁸.

- **Lack of integration of provision**

Finally, there is lack of integration of provision with a policy demarcation between young people leaving compulsory education and further, higher education, employment and training. Watts *et al.*, (2001) investigated working links between careers services within and outside higher education and noted differences in political accountability, professional organisation, professional qualifications, location and functions, and well as culture and status. They highlight how salaries and conditions of service tend to be superior in higher education institutions (HEIs)¹⁹ compared with other parts of the sector.

Within HEIs, the integration of careers education with other employability related initiatives is also being reviewed (for example, Personal Development Planning (PDP); Progress Files; work experience; entrepreneurship and enterprise). The Higher Education Academy²⁰ is currently developing benchmarks for incorporating transferable skills into programme specifications to help improve consistently and coherence across all subject areas.

¹⁶ Harris (2001) (op cit) indicated that 'The sector needs to agree the services which students are entitled to receive after leaving the institution.....some institutions may want to extend availability of their services beyond two years, either on a fee-paying basis or as part of their strategy for maintaining links with alumni.' (recommendation 9, page 22)

¹⁷ In the case of their own graduates, only 38% of HEIs offered an indefinite service; most of the rest restricted it to 2-3 years post-graduation. In the case of graduates from other institutions, many confined it to a limited service and/ or for a limited period (usually 2-3 years post-graduation) - Extract taken from: Watts, A.G., Hughes, D., & Wood, M. (2005) *A Market in Career? Evidence and Issues*. Derby: University of Derby, CeGS, p. 6 paragraph 3.3.

¹⁸ Watts, A.G., Hughes, D., & Wood, M. (2005) *A Market in Careers? Evidence and Issues*. CeGS Occasional Paper Series. University of Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies p.6.

¹⁹ Watts, A. G., Hughes, D., & Haslam, D. (2001) Closer Working Relationships between Careers Services Within and Outside Higher Education, *Journal of Education and Work*, 14, 1, pp51-70

²⁰ For further information on the Higher Education Academy visit: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/>

The relatively high level of autonomy enjoyed by the Universities in England makes it difficult to make all-embracing statements, but it is reasonable to assert that the tensions regarding guidance outlined above exist to a greater or lesser extent in all universities.

4. Commissioned research into guidance for higher education

A major research study has been commissioned by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) in collaboration with the University and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS). Two cohorts of applicants are being surveyed at four points in their careers: as they are about to embark on higher education, one year later, after three years of study and finally in 2010 and 2011 respectively. These core surveys thus comprise a six year tracking study of 2005 and 2006 UCAS applicants, a sufficient period to follow most into employment or postgraduate training. The research will provide an unprecedented and robust account of the way students plan and prepare for their working lives beyond university. The core studies will be complemented by a range of shorter-term subsidiary studies examining emerging themes in more depth as part of a major HECSU-funded programme on career decision-making. One of these, currently underway, is mapping curriculum development and career decision-making in higher education, with the goal of disseminating good practice.

These surveys provide an opportunity to track students through higher education and beyond, exploring at each stage how different types of students and graduates encounter opportunities and make decisions. The key objective is to map the current and emerging graduate labour markets and the impact of higher education expansion on UK employment, but the researchers will also be able to compare new data with studies of graduates as far back as the 1980s – when participation in HE was at very different levels.

The project is being undertaken by a team of researchers from the Universities of West of England and Warwick, led by Professor Kate Purcell at Employment Studies Research Unit and Professor Peter Elias at the Warwick Institute for Employment Research.²¹

In addition, the HEFCE CETL initiative,²² which began in April 2005, provides funding for five-year development and research projects specifically designed to support the higher education employability agenda. Funding of CETLs will total £315 million over five years from 2005-06 to 2009-10. Each CETL will receive recurrent funding, ranging from £200,000 to £500,000 per annum for five years, and a capital sum ranging from £0.8 million to £2 million. This initiative represents HEFCE's largest ever single funding initiative in teaching and learning. In this context, the University of Reading Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) is currently establishing a national 'centre of excellence' for career management skills. It aims to: -

- Create a suite of teaching and learning materials and approaches that will support students with their career management from foundation through to postgraduate level.

²¹ For further information about the wider research programme, go to: <http://www.hecsu.ac.uk>

²² For further information about the wider programme, go to: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/TInits/cetl/>

- Make the highly adaptable model developed at Reading available to FE and HE sectors, supporting institutions to modify materials to their own circumstances.
- Reward staff for excellence in teaching and supporting career management skills development at both Reading and throughout the HE sector.
- Support further academic innovation to enrich the Centre and the whole HE sector.

Conclusion

The higher education landscape in the UK reflects a rich tapestry of information, advice and careers guidance provision, with significant inconsistencies across services for both young people and adults at the point of entry to Universities, whilst undertaking HE courses and after they leave. A substantial amount of research has already been undertaken into the types of careers interventions that support students and graduates progress through higher education into the labour market and further research is underway that will address some of the key relating to IAG and HE.

Key Issues

- There are significant variations in levels of service provision and resource allocation for pre-course, on-course and post-course IAG support.
- Tensions exist in relation to the role of the university admission tutor compared with the careers adviser.
- Related to this potential role conflict, tensions also exist around recruitment for courses that are under-subscribed compared with selection for those that are highly competitive.
- There is a lack of integration of IAG services available both at the point of entry to higher education and at the point of exit.
- There is a significant gap in service provision for students who 'drop out' from their courses prior to completion.
- Career professional associations operating within and outside of HEIs have very separate arrangements which often result in the use of differing terminology used to describe careers work, quality standards and professional qualifications.

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