

# NAVIGATING THE LABOUR MARKET: CAREER DECISION MAKING & THE ROLE OF GUIDANCE

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## Foreword

A qualitative, longitudinal study of effective guidance in England is being conducted by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research over the period 2002 to 2008. It has been funded by the Department for Education and Skills, Access to Learning Division (subsequently renamed Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). This is the fourth major report from this study.

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance by tracking the career trajectories of research participants over a five year period and establish the role of guidance in this process. Fifty in-depth case studies were initially completed (December, 2003 to March, 2004). Analyses of these data are presented in the first report<sup>1</sup>. All fifty of the clients who participated in the first phase of investigation were contacted by telephone during the period October, 2004 to March 2005, approximately one year after their case study interview. Forty-five were successfully interviewed and the second report<sup>2</sup> was based on follow-up findings relating to their career progression, reflections on the guidance interview, future plans and next steps. Thirty-six clients were successfully contacted three years into the study and an analysis of their progress was presented in the third report<sup>3</sup>.

This fourth report is based on data collected from the 30 clients who were successfully contacted three years after the case study interview<sup>4</sup> (four years into the study). It focuses on how the career trajectories of participants in England are developing. In particular, it highlights the career decision making styles of the clients, together with a consideration of the barriers and influences on these career choices and decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full text of the first report: Bimrose, J, Barnes, S-A., Hughes, D. and Orton, M. (2004) *What is Effective Guidance? Evidence from Longitudinal Case Studies in England*. London: Department for Education and Skills, Coventry: Warwick: Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/egr2004.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> For the full text of the second report: Bimrose, J., Barnes, S-A. and Hughes, D. (2005) *Effective Guidance One Year On: Evidence from Longitudinal Case Studies in England*. London: Department for Education and Skills, Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/2005/egreportoct05.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Bimrose, J., Barnes, S-A. and Hughes, D. (2006) *Developing Career Trajectories in England: The Role of Effective Guidance*. London: Department for Education and Skills, Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/egreportnov06.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this report, the guidance interview that clients received as part of the initial, in-depth case study research investigation is referred to as the 'case study interview'.

## **Acknowledgements**

Warwick Institute for Employment Research would like to thank the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (formerly Department for Education and Skills) for its support for this project. Our sincere thanks also go to the 30 clients who gave up their time to talk to us for the fourth consecutive year – some of whom took the initiative and contacted us with their change of contact details. Without their ongoing help, interest and co-operation, this study would not be possible.

As in the previous two years, the fieldwork for this third year of investigation was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from three centres of expertise in guidance. Their continued professionalism is highly valued and greatly appreciated. Contributions were as follows:

- **Institute for Employment Research (IER)** at the University of Warwick, project managed and took a central role in the fieldwork, data management and data analysis. IER led on the writing of the report.

Dr. Jenny Bimrose – Principal Research Fellow and Project Manager

Dr. Sally-Anne Barnes – Senior Research Fellow

Dr. Michael Orton – Senior Research Fellow

- **International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS)** at the University of Derby assisted with fieldwork and data analysis.

Deirdre Hughes – University Reader in Guidance Studies and Director of iCeGS (who acted as an external moderator for data coding and as a critical reader for the final report).

Denise Smith – Research Associate

Irene Krechowicka – Research Associate

- **National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC)** assisted with the field research.

Lesley Haughton – Fellow

Finally, thanks go once again to Mary Munro, the external evaluator for the project, who is an Associate Fellow of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling. She continues to provide invaluable contributions to the research process, the approach to data analysis and to the structure and content of the report.

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## Executive summary

*Please note:* throughout this report, the guidance interview that clients received as part of the initial, in-depth case study, which comprised the first year of this research investigation (2003-2004), is referred to as the 'case study interview' (irrespective of whether this was their first guidance interview or a follow-up). The research interview conducted three years on is referred to as the 'third follow-up' interview.

In this fourth year of data collection, there has again been a **low attrition rate for research participants** with an overall follow-up rate of 60% from the original sample of 50 participants. **Thirty (83%)** of the 36 clients who were interviewed for the two year follow-up interviews were also interviewed for the three years on follow-up interviews.

This longitudinal study has been successful in tracking the career trajectories and decision making styles of participants. It **provides evidence on the positive impacts of useful guidance three years on**, confirming similar findings from the first three years of the study.

Data provides rich insights into **changes to occupational and personal roles, skills and competence development and influences on progression.**

The proportion of **clients who have entered full-time employment** over the period since the case study interview **has increased** from 22 per cent (that is, 11 of the client participants in 2003/04) to 53 per cent (that is, 16 of the client participants in 2006/07). However, several clients (30%, n=9) have experienced significant changes in their personal life which have prompted a re-evaluation of priorities, career goals and employment.

There is strong evidence to suggest that **clients still value their guidance interviews** some time after the event. Four years after their interviews, the majority still regarded guidance as useful (77%, n=23). However, seven per cent of clients (n=2) were less sure of its usefulness, whilst 17 per cent (n=5) of clients could no longer remember the guidance they had received.

Consistent with findings from the previous follow-up interviews, **guidance is regarded as useful** when it: **challenged ideas and understanding; inspired self-confidence;**

**increased self-awareness; gave direction**, focus or a plan for the future; **provided access to information**, knowledge and computer-aided guidance programmes; and **structured opportunities to talk to a professional**.

There is significant evidence that these adult **clients are taking advantage of professional networks to: gain affirmation of their ideas and plans; illicit support and help; and access required information**. Personal networks were also being used extensively as 'sounding boards' for ideas.

**Equal numbers of clients felt that they did, or did not have a career** (23%, n=7). **Others felt they were working towards a career** (37%, n=11). Developing a 'career' was regarded as gaining a qualification, changing occupations, gaining more experience or achieving a higher level position in their organisation.

The **fourfold typology of career decision-making**, which was identified during the previous phase of investigation, was tested and found to be stable over a two year period. These styles are: **strategic; evaluative; aspirational; and opportunistic**.

Four clients still participating in this investigation were continuing to experience **barriers to employment**. These barriers were **ill health and out-dated skills**.

In nine cases (30%), there is clear evidence of **career resilience**. This relates to the ability to take control, proactively, of their careers, by **managing challenging and difficult circumstances**.

A significant number of **clients expressed a future need for help and guidance in achieving their plans**. This was required to help with: applying to higher education; changing career or job; gaining more experience; seeking help with personal circumstances; focusing ideas; and discussing future employment possibilities.

**Career management competences play an important role** for many clients in exploring employment and learning opportunities, finding employment, increasing their self-confidence and making career-related decisions.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Three years on**

This is the fourth report from a study of effective guidance, currently underway in England. The overall aim of the longitudinal study is:

- to use a qualitative, longitudinal case study approach to investigate the nature of effective guidance for adults and how, over the longer-term, it can add value to post-compulsory learning and enhance employability.

The particular aim of the fourth phase of the investigation was to explore client transitions during the third year after their case study guidance interview and how their career trajectories have been influenced by the guidance received in the initial phase of investigation.

Objectives were to:

- continue to track the career progress of clients since their case study guidance interview in the initial phase of this investigation;
- investigate the clients' perceptions of their initial case study guidance interview and expectations of guidance;
- explore the nature of any gains that clients may have made in developing their knowledge, skills and experiences;
- investigate the clients' views of their progress and barriers;
- consider the development of career management competencies and the existence of career resilience; and
- further test the typology of career decision making which emerged from the third phase of data analysis.

This longitudinal research began with a detailed investigation of 50 in-depth case studies across varied guidance contexts (2003-2004). Each case study included a detailed examination of a guidance interview from the perspectives of the client receiving guidance, the practitioner giving the guidance and an independent third party. The purpose of the four follow-up phases of the research, scheduled over the period 2004-2008, is to track the career progression of the clients who were the recipients of guidance in these original case studies.



Of the original 50 clients, 45 were successfully contacted and interviewed by telephone one year after the case study interview, during the period October, 2004 – March, 2005. Two years on, 36 clients were interviewed by telephone about their career progression over the previous year. Three years on, 30 clients were interviewed about their career progression over the previous year. It is the findings from this third phase of follow-up that are presented in this report.

## **1.2 Key findings from the initial phases of study**

The professional contexts in which the original case studies were carried out included: further education; higher education; charitable/voluntary organisations; adult guidance organisations; and the workplace. Detailed findings from the first three reports can be found in Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes and Orton, 2004<sup>5</sup>; Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes, 2005<sup>6</sup>; and Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes, 2006<sup>7</sup>.

In summary, immediately after the event, the majority (98%, n=49) of the original participants evaluated their case study interview<sup>8</sup> as 'useful'. These clients regarded their guidance positively because it had: provided challenge and direction; given access to relevant resources; could be accessed over a period of time; brought about positive change(s); and provided support and safety. In addition to recording the perceptions of clients about the usefulness of their guidance intervention, data gathered during the first phase of investigation permitted a typology of the guidance interview to be generated from practitioner interventions across the forty-nine interviews evaluated as 'useful' by clients.

One year after the case study interview, it was found that guidance had acted as a catalyst for positive change for many of the clients contacted (n=45), even where agreed action had not been implemented or advice followed. Seventy-eight per cent (n=35) of clients who were followed-up felt that guidance had resulted in direct and positive change (such as: a change in their situation, thinking, and/or future plans; being pointed in the right direction; given alternative options/ideas to consider; or had ideas affirmed). Thirty-one per cent (n=14) of clients felt guidance had resulted in indirect positive

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<sup>5</sup> Op cit.

<sup>6</sup> Op cit.

<sup>7</sup> Op cit.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this report, the guidance interview that clients received as part of the initial, in-depth case study research investigation is referred to as the 'case study interview' (irrespective of whether this was their first guidance interview or a follow-up).

change (such as: increased confidence or motivation). Many were improving their occupational competence, by engaging with education or training to up-skilling, re-skilling or training for re-entry to the labour market. Most who had recently completed higher education were experiencing prolonged transitions into the labour market. Four barriers to career progression were identified, which had prevented clients from implementing the action plans agreed during the case study interview. These comprised: financial constraints; childcare commitments; health issues and local labour market conditions.

Two years after the case study interview, 72 per cent (n=26) of the 36 clients successfully contacted still regarded their guidance interview as useful. However, 14% (n=5) of clients were unsure of its usefulness, whilst 14 per cent (n=5) of clients could no longer recollect the guidance they had received. The one client who had not found their case study interview useful immediately after the event recognised, two years on, that some aspects had proved to be of value. Those who had found their guidance useful indicated how it: provided valuable insights; helped to focus ideas; improved self-confidence, provided opportunities to reflect and gave access to expert information. Four distinct career decision making styles emerged from the data: evaluative, strategic, aspirational and opportunistic.

### **1.3 Building on previous findings**

This third phase of follow-up builds on previous findings by continuing to focus on the career progression of clients, their perception of guidance received and its role in their career development. Three years after their case study interview, clients were asked to assess: the usefulness of the guidance they had received in the light of developments over the past two years; the type of support, if any, they had received (and from whom); the influences and circumstance affecting their decisions and choices over the last year (see Appendix 1). This phase of investigation has also provided the opportunity to test further the typology of career decision making styles that emerged in the second phase

### **1.4 Skill development: the policy context**

The White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005<sup>9</sup>) complements and extends the earlier Skills White Paper

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<sup>9</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Skills: Getting On in Business; Getting On at Work*. Cmd 6483-I, 6483-II, Cmd 6483-III. London: Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved June 4, 2005: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/>.

'21st Century Skills: Realising our potential' (DfES, Dti, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003<sup>10</sup>). In combination, these two White Papers contain the government's strategy for raising the skill level of the labour force in the UK and of ensuring the supply of skills in the labour force matches employer demand. Alongside a high priority given to the efficient functioning of the labour market, the importance of the personal fulfilment that can be derived from the skill development of individuals is emphasised, together with the key role for 'improved' information, advice and guidance (IAG) in supporting individuals make more effective choices.

In 2006, the Leitch Review was commissioned to identify the UK's optimal skills mix for 2020. Its ultimate objectives were to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice by setting an appropriate policy framework. The Review reflects the findings of the Skills White Papers (DfES, Dti, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003<sup>11</sup>; Department for Education and Skills, 2005<sup>12</sup>), confirming that, in order to be economically competitive, the UK must 'raise its game' by increasing the skill levels of its labour force (HM Treasury, 2006, p.1<sup>13</sup>). It identifies the importance of embedding a culture of learning and proposes that 'a new and sustained national campaign to raise career aspirations and awareness' will contribute to the achievement of the skills agenda (p.103), together with support to make informed choices (p 107). For England, this Review recommends the establishment of a 'new universal adult careers service, providing labour market focused careers advice for all adults' (p.23). The importance of effective IAG to the up-skilling agenda for raising aspirations is stressed (p.106), claiming its equal importance for both young people and adults – since 'too few young people at age 14 are making the link between careers guidance and their personal decisions (p. 107).

The implementation plan for the Leitch Review (HM Government and DIUS, 2007<sup>14</sup>) takes up the challenge of implementing the skills agenda, acknowledging that there is

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<sup>10</sup> Department for Education and Skills, Department for Trade and Industry, HM Treasury and Department for Work and Pensions (2003) *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential [Individuals, Employers, Nation]*. Cm 5810. London: Department for Education and Skills Retrieved May 30, 2007 from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/21st%20Century%20Skills.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Op cit.

<sup>12</sup> Op cit.

<sup>13</sup> HM Treasury (2006) *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. Norwich: The Stationery Office. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/523/43/leitch\\_finalreport051206.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/523/43/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> HM Government and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*. Cmd 7181, Norwich: HMSO. Retrieved January 18, 2008 from: <http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/worldclassskills.pdf>.

still 'a mountain to climb' (p.6). It states how the new adult careers service will 'give every adult easy access to skills and careers advice that will help them find work and progress in their careers' (p. 7) and that this new service will 'ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions, and to get the support they need to advance themselves and achieve their full potential' (p.10).

Given this increased policy emphasis on learning, raising expectations and supporting progression, what exactly is known about career decision making and development that can support the effective delivery of the new adult careers service in England, due for full implementation from 2010 (HM Government and DIUS, 2007<sup>15</sup>)? Tracking the career trajectories of 30 clients of guidance over a period of four years in this longitudinal study has provided a unique opportunity to analyse the way in which individuals make occupational choices, overcome barriers to progression and navigate distinctive pathways, over time. It has also enabled scrutiny of the relationship between the agreed outcomes of guidance interviews and subsequent career progression.

### **1.5 What next?**

The 30 clients who participated in this phase of follow-up gave their permission to be contacted in a year. This fifth and final phase of the research (2007-2008), involving the fourth year of follow-ups after the initial case study interview will, once more, involve telephone interviews. The career trajectories of these clients will continue to be tracked and issues that have emerged from the analysis of data so far will be further investigated. Specifically, the final year follow-up will probe: career progression and future plans; views on progression and perceived barriers; gains made by clients in developing their knowledge, skills and experiences; and further guidance support, both received and required. The final phase of analysis will also provide the opportunity to reflect on various aspects of the research methodology, such as its impact on participants and the characteristics of participants who dropped out. Data accumulated over the five years on barriers to employment will also be reviewed. This fifth and final report, detailing findings from the third year of follow-up, will be produced in the autumn of 2008.

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<sup>15</sup> Op cit

## 1.6 Report structure

In addition to this first section, the report contains a further five sections, including the conclusions from the study. Section two outlines the follow-up methodology. This includes a summary of the approach taken to the analysis of data, details of response rates and demographic data. Section three examines the developing careers of clients. In particular, it focuses on changes in employment status, developing skills, perceptions of 'career', career resilience and future plans. The fourth section discusses the fourfold typology of career decision making styles identified in the previous report (Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes, 2006<sup>16</sup>), having tested them over the period of a year. The fifth section explores clients' perceptions of useful guidance, together with a review of career management competencies identified. The sixth and final section presents the conclusions from the fourth year of investigation in this longitudinal study.

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<sup>16</sup> Op cit

## **2. Methodology: follow-up of clients**

Of the 36 clients who were interviewed for the second follow-up (two years after the case study interview), 30 were successfully contacted by telephone for the third follow-up (three years after the case study interview).

The research team for the 2006/07 follow-ups comprised five of the eight researchers who originally undertook data collection for the initial case studies. The researchers who undertook the follow-ups contacted the same clients for a third year. This process has been vital in ensuring continuity for clients, but more importantly in building upon the established relationships and the level of trust which has developed over the four years of the study. All of the research team have expertise in conducting in-depth qualitative interviews. Three of the team are experienced guidance practitioners.

This section outlines the methods used to contact these thirty clients, the response rates and details of the clients contacted. The approach adopted for the analysis of the transcripts is also briefly discussed.

Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of data, since the number of clients participating in this phase of analysis has decreased. As with all previous reports completed for this investigation, in discussing results, numbers are presented followed by their percentage in relation to the sample size.

### **2.1 Developing the interview proforma**

As in previous years, clients were contacted and interviewed by telephone. An interview proforma was developed to guide the interviews (see Appendix 1). Key issues and themes drawn from the previous follow-up interviews were used to inform the development of the interview proforma for this phase of the study. The overall aim of the interviews were to explore client transitions three years on from their initial case study interview and how these related to influences, life changes and barriers. The proforma comprised questions based on the following framework of topics:

- current situation and changes;
- career development and changes over the last 12 months;
- reflections on the initial guidance interview and further guidance;
- further help and support in achieving career goals;
- what should guidance do?;

- client self-reflection and developing career management skills;
- decision making, influences and constraints; and
- plans for the next year.

## 2.2 Contacting clients and response rates

All thirty clients contacted had previously given permission to be contacted. Six clients could not be contacted. Telephone details for four were no longer valid and alternatives could not be found (despite using various strategies that had previously proved successful). Of the remaining two clients, one had taken a sabbatical and was travelling at the time of the follow-up interviews<sup>17</sup>; and the second had indicated in her last follow-up interview that she no longer felt able to participate in the study, due to personal circumstances.

A variety of methods were used to establish contact. Overall:

- between 1 and 44 attempts by telephone were made;
- 32 telephone messages were left; and
- 16 emails and 3 letters were sent.

Contact with clients was made using their preferred method (identified at the previous follow-up interview). Where permission had been given, clients' parents were also used as a point of contact. This was a particularly helpful method of contact for those clients changing location for work and/or travelling. Again email proved to be an effective method for contacting clients (also for clients contacting researchers). All clients had already given consent to be contacted again. In 13 cases, the follow-up interview took place immediately once contacted by the researcher. In 17 cases the researcher agreed to call at a time that was more convenient time for the client.

As in previous years, clients were happy to respond to the questions and share their stories and future plans. The length of the telephone interviews ranged from (approximately) 13 to 51 minutes, with the average length just over 29 minutes.

Thirty of the 50 clients who originally participated in the in-depth case studies were successfully contacted three years on, achieving an overall response rate of 60% (see Table 1, below). Overall, clients have been lost to this research investigation across all

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<sup>17</sup> It is expected that this client will wish to continue their participation in the study and attempts to contact them will be made in the final year of the study.

five professional guidance contexts in which the in-depth case studies were carried out<sup>18</sup>. A good response rate was achieved from clients who had their case study interview<sup>19</sup> in a Higher Education Institution, within a private organisation or funded by their workplace. As in previous years, high attrition rates occurred for those case studies recorded in the further education context and the community/outreach guidance and not-for-profit organisational context (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Response rates by context for years 1, 2 and 3 follow-ups**

Case study context	Number of clients successfully contact after their case study interview			
	One year on	Two years on	Three years on	
<b>Connexions, IAGP &amp; Jobcentre Plus</b> (n=14)	Total (%)	12 86	10 71	9 64
<b>Higher education</b> (n=10)	Total (%)	9 90	9 90	8 80
<b>Further education</b> (n=10)	Total (%)	9 90	4 40	3 30
<b>Community/outreach guidance &amp; not for profit organisations</b> (n=8)	Total (%)	7 88	5 63	4 50
<b>Private organisations &amp; workplace guidance</b> (n=8)	Total (%)	8 100	8 100	6 75
<b>Total number of clients contacted</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Overall response rate</b>		<b>90%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>60%</b>

### 2.3 Characteristics of clients successfully contacted three years on

Of the 30 clients successfully contacted three years on from the case study interview, 60% are female (n=18) and 40% are male (n=12)<sup>20</sup>. Characteristics of clients

<sup>18</sup> The five guidance contexts were: higher education; further education; Connexions, IAGP & Job Centre Plus; community/outreach/not-for-profit organisations; and private organisations or workplace guidance.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout this report, the guidance interview that clients received as part of the initial, in-depth case study, which comprised the first year of this research investigation, is referred to as the 'case study interview' (irrespective of whether this was their first guidance interview or a follow-up).

<sup>20</sup> The initial client population participating in the study consisted, 66% female (n=33) and 34% male (n=17).



successfully contacted for the third year of follow-ups were compiled using data collected during the initial phase of the study including: age; ethnic origin; and disability. These data are presented in Table 2, below, according to professional contexts in which the case study interview had taken place.

**Table 2 Characteristics of those clients successfully contacted 3 years on\***

Client characteristics	Organisational context															Total
	Connexions, IAGP & Jobcentre Plus			Higher Education			Further Education			Community/outreach guidance & not-for-profit organisations			Private organisations & workplace guidance			
	Male	Female	Total n=10	Male	Female	Total n=9	Male	Female	Total n=4	Male	Female	Total n=5	Male	Female	Total n=8	
<b>Age</b>																
18-29	2	3	5	2	5	7	1	2	3	1		1		2	2	18
30-39	1	2	3	1		1				1		1	1	1	2	7
40-49											1	1	1	1	2	3
50-59		1	1							1		1				2
60+																
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>																
White UK		1	1	1		1	1	1	1							3
White British	2	2	4	2	3	5		1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	14
White English					1	1										1
White European		1	1										1		1	2
White British					1	1								1	1	2
British English	1	1	2					1	1	1		1				4
British Caribbean		1	1							1		1				2
Black Caribbean																
Black British														1	1	1
Phillipine																
* 'Half caste' (Nigerian/White)														1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Disability</b>																
yes		1	1		1	1				1	1	2	1		1	5
no	3	5	8	3	3	6	1	2	3	2		2	1	4	5	24
unknown					1	1										1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>

\* The data presented in this table were collected during the initial phase of the study. Details are included only for those clients who were successfully contacted three years on from the case study interview. Disability and ethnic origin were self-reported by the clients.

Over half (60%, n=18) of the clients successfully contacted were aged between 18 and 29 years. Across all contexts, 23% of clients were aged 30-39 years (n=7), 10% were 40-49 years (n=3) and 7% were aged 50-59 years (n=2). Of those clients successfully contacted three years on, 73% (n=22) self-reported their ethnic origin as 'White' or as 'White' with a nationality assigned. Six clients (20%) defined themselves as 'British' or 'English'. Only two of the four female clients (7%) who defined themselves variously from an ethnic minority group (including 'Black British' and 'Half Cast' (50% Nigerian and 50% White)) were successfully contacted three years on. Five (17%) of the initial seven clients self-reporting a disability were successfully contacted three years on.

## **2.4 Approach to the analysis**

The thirty clients successfully contacted were interviewed by telephone using an agreed proforma (see Appendix 1). Clients were encouraged to respond openly and reflect upon aspects of their career and decision making over the last year. These interviews were transcribed and analysed using QSR NVivo 2 (a qualitative data analysis software package<sup>21</sup>). Codes (see Appendix 2) were used to categorise inductively the text by one researcher. Two further researchers moderated a selection of the transcripts to check for accuracy and a shared understanding of the emerging themes.

Career decision making styles emerged from an analysis of the two years on transcripts. Clients were tentatively categorised to four styles: opportunistic; evaluative; aspirational; and strategic. This theme has been explored in more depth with particular attention to an analysis of the clients' reflections on their career decision making processes and their trajectories. An in-depth analysis of clients' decision making styles revealed some changes in their categorisation; one was assigned to a different style; and two who were facing barriers to career progression were found to be implementing characteristics of the opportunistic style of career decision making (these are explored further in Section 4.5). Relationships between career decision making styles, age, gender, highest qualification gained and employment status were explored.

Emerging themes, discussed in the following sections, include: developments in clients' skill, career trajectories and plans; career decision making styles and barriers to progression; and reflections on guidance.

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<sup>21</sup> For further information on this package see Appendix 13 of the first report.

### **3. Clients: developing careers, skills and plans**

Over the three years, since their initial guidance interview, clients' career paths have constantly changed as they: progress in their chosen occupation; change jobs; move from unemployment to employment; engage in a process of up-skilling and re-skilling; and address changes in their life.

This section of the report not only examines changes in clients' employment status over the last four years, but highlights clients' experiences and reflections on how their careers and skills are developing. Finally, clients' immediate and future plans are outlined to demonstrate client career goals and expectations for their future.

#### **3.1 Changes in clients' employment status**

The employment status of clients, since their initial case study interview, has been recorded and tracked. Table 3, tracks these changes over the last three years indicating caring responsibilities, participation in training and/or education courses, engagement in voluntary work, changes in working hours, occupational change and progression. As client numbers have decreased over the period of the research some caution is required when interpreting this data.

Over the period since the case study interview, the number of clients registered as unemployed has decreased. Two clients were suffering with health related problems and were unemployed as a result. However, since they were technically not available for work, they were not registered as unemployed at the time of the third follow-up interview. The proportion of clients who have entered full-time employment over the period since the case study interview has increased from 22 per cent (that is, 11 of the client participants in 2003/04) to 53 per cent (that is, 16 of the client participants in 2006/07) (see Table 3, below). The number of clients in education and/or training has remained stable over the last few years reflecting those clients who left higher education and moved into full-time employment, and those who entered training after their initial guidance interview and are still on their course.

**Table 3 Change in client employment status, 2003/04 - 2006/07**

Employment status	Number of clients			
	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	
undertaking voluntary work		1	2	
undertaking voluntary work and in training			1	
<b>Unemployed with caring responsibilities</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>In training/education</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
higher level of training/education		1	2	1
changed course		1		
<b>In training/education with caring responsibilities</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
higher level of training/education		1		
undertaking voluntary work			1	
<b>Part-time employed</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
with caring responsibilities		2	1	2
with caring responsibilities and in training/education			1	1
in training/education		1	1	1
occupational change			1	1
occupational change and in training/education		1	1	
<b>Full-time employed*</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>
with caring responsibilities	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	
promotion		4	2	
occupational change		3	3	6
occupational change and in training			1	1
occupational change and caring responsibilities		1		
in training/education		3	2	2
undertaking voluntary work			1	
<b>Other (ill health)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>
with caring responsibilities				1
in training/education				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>

Note: \* employed full-time or employed in a number of part-time jobs equivalent to full-time employment

In addition to these changes in employment status, clients have, variously, over the last year:

- received a promotion and/or pay rise (10%, n=3);
- undertaken a job placement as part of a training course or occupational requirement (20%, n=6);
- completed their training course and/or gained a qualification (13%, n=4);
- gained new skills (such as learning sign language, developing IT skills etc.) (43%, n=13);
- undertaken voluntary work (17%, n= 5); and/or
- changed location (including moving house and finding work abroad) (10%, n=3).

For several clients (30%, n=9) there have been significant changes in their personal circumstances, which have, in turn, prompted re-evaluation of priorities, career goals and employment. These changes have included: engagement for marriage; termination of significant relationships; changing lifestyles; changes in family; and increased alienation because of lack of fulfilment.

Details illustrating how clients are improving their labour market value follow.

### **3.2 Developing confidence, skills and knowledge**

As previously, clients interviewed for the third follow-up reflected upon, and talked openly about, changes in themselves, their circumstances and skills. The career development of most participants is evident through their increased self-confidence, greater awareness (of opportunities, options and opportunities), together with increased self-efficacy (that is, a stronger belief in their skills and knowledge).

The majority recognised that their self-confidence had increased (77%, n=23). Many (60%, n=18) had acquired a greater self-awareness of options. For instance, clients:

- recognised the need for a higher level qualification and/or skills to progress;
- appreciated the likely nature of future job opportunities;
- recognised the value of work experience to support course and job applications; and
- understood currently available educational courses, vacancies and promotions.

Some had become more aware of the vagaries of the labour market, appreciating precisely what they needed to achieve, or complete, before their career plans could be advanced (23%, n=7). For example, one had researched available courses to maximise future employment opportunities, recognising the complex relationship between qualifications versus experience:

*The other one [course] I've seen at [name of university]...is a bit specialist, but I also think there's quite a lot of jobs in it... ...I expect I'll be up against sort of graduates and people that are younger. It depends what they want. It they want someone who's had more experience, then they'll go for me. But I expect there will be some young... graduates of finance... ...They might prefer that.*

[Interview 29]

For others, this increased awareness of labour market realities has not necessarily proved positive for all clients. One is resigned to his options being limited because of the lack of demand for his out-dated skills set:

*But beggars can't be choosers as they say. So at the moment it [part-time job] covers the bills, so...oh well, you can't have everything can you?...I was applying for jobs I knew I could do and nothing was coming back... ...unless there are jobs there for you to go to... ...especially within engineering, there's just not the jobs there within my particular field.*

[Interview 13]

Irrespective of the precise nature of the impact on clients of increased awareness, it is interesting to note that the majority seemed able to articulate their own likes and dislikes more clearly (87%, n=26) and that for the majority, this had been positive. One client had discovered that she 'loved learning', which had resulted in her undertaking a higher level qualification.

However, eleven clients (37%) were obviously lacking in confidence in their skills, experience and/or ability to find work or make a decision. One woman returning to the labour market after a prolonged absence for child care was setting up as self-employed and was acutely aware of her limitations:

*I mean I feel a little bit panicky, because it's quite hard getting back into it...It's a little bit scary because I still don't feel I'm, you know, I'm not up to scratch with doing things efficiently. So that's where I am really...and, you know, you're bogged down by, "Am I doing it right?" And, you know, not having enough time. Everything coming together and, you know, being a little bit out of control...I'm absolutely petrified!*

[Interview 40]

Nevertheless, clients talked confidently about their career decisions, sometimes adopting a pragmatic approach to the realities of having to cover the bills, pay the rent and accommodate care responsibilities. Proximity to family, home and existing networks have emerged as important factors for many. For others, primacy has been given to an assessment of their skills, needs and abilities in relation to labour market opportunities. Further details of the career decision making styles adopted by clients are presented in Section 4.

### 3.3 Clients' perceptions of 'career'

As part of developing an understanding of career trajectories and career decision making, clients were asked whether they thought they had a 'career'<sup>22</sup>. Opinions were split. Some (23%, n=7) believed that they did have a career. This was because they were in a position in which they could progress, were financially independent or had gained significant status in their organisation. The same proportion of clients (23%, n=7), in contrast, believed that they did not have a career. These clients talked more in terms of having a 'job'. For instance:

*Probably not, no...I almost think like I don't...I think this is a job... ..perhaps if I was trained more in a particular area I would see that more as a career.*

[Interview 41]

*I consider it is a normal job. It's not really a career is it? You sort of just go in do photocopying and everyone comes down telling you what to do.*

[Interview 13]

Two others were unsure whether they had a 'career'. One client with aspirations to enter medicine responded:

*When I think of the word 'career'...I think... ..of medicine as a life service... ..when I think of career...I think of people going to the City. I think of people putting on their suits and looking very sharp and going to work in the City to make money. That's the way I see career to be... ..I'd call it [medicine] a profession because...it's a life service...it carries a whole lot of meaning. I'm not saying people who work in the City are not doing good, but that's the way it comes across to me when I use the word 'career'.*

[Interview 47]

The largest proportion of clients, however, did not believe that they had a career at present (37%, n=11). Rather, this was something they were working towards. A 'career' for these clients would require gaining a qualification, changing occupation, gaining more experience or achieving a higher level position in their organisation. One client currently undertaking a postgraduate qualification said:

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<sup>22</sup> Three clients were not asked if they had a 'career', as were experiencing challenging personal circumstances and it was felt by the research inappropriate.



*I think once I've finished the postgraduate degree, I see that as sort of the end of the formal education. And once I get into a job after that, I think I'll consider that as my career.*

[Interview 14]

For another client, a 'career' represented a future goal or aspiration:

*Not yet... ..I'd like to have a career... ..*

[Interview 22]

Overall, clients' perceptions of what 'career' means were similar. For the majority, this was defined by: the requirement for higher level qualifications; reasonable experience in the field; a higher status in the organisation; the ability to progress; and a position of authority.

### **3.4 Clients' career resilience**

For successful career advancement, individuals will need to navigate and manage difficulties that arise in a sensitive and astute manner. In nine cases in this research study (30%), there is clear evidence of career resilience. This is illustrated by clients' proactively taking control of challenging situations. For example, one client has had to deal with an organisational restructuring, which had re-configured work teams. As a result, she has had to manage her situation carefully:

*I've changed teams entirely and there's been a bit of restructuring as to the old role that I was doing... ..a lot of the responsibilities were moved to a different team and effectively I was given no choice...it has taken a bit of a back step...so unfortunately I've not been able to move forward as quickly as I'd hoped. But I feel now I'm in a really strong position... ..I know my next goal... it's just really a question of how to achieve that as quickly and as efficiently as possible...It's about transferring those skills and trying to learn the new skills...it has been extremely hard... ..In terms of trying to guide my own career internally, I think it's really a question of working hard and proving myself and being able to, you know, to sort of demonstrate my skills the best way I can...*

[Interview 6]

Another example of career resilience is demonstrated by a client who is continuing to progress her career by up-skilling, despite difficult family circumstances. She is undertaking a course of study, which is proving difficult because of the demands placed upon her by her sick child. This has hindered her ability to complete her assignments to

deadline and undertake job placements that are a course requirement. Yet these difficulties are serving to make her more determined to succeed:

*I've had quite a bad start to the course, but I'm still trying to hang on in there, you know... ..I know why I'm doing this [qualification], because I want to have a better life for [family]. I keep thinking well, you know, I keep thinking well one day we'll maybe have a better place together, you know... ..I'm just going to go and work and shut myself into it and absorb myself into it and just it makes me more determined in a way.*

[Interview 20]

Other examples include: a client who has had to move geographical location; three who have been struggling to find employment that fits with their skills, qualifications and/or career goals; and two clients whose initial course applications were rejected. All have become more determined to succeed by trying other routes and are demonstrating the tenacity they will required to overcome the difficulties that have arisen.

Some clients are also dealing with setbacks in their personal lives. The majority of clients believed that they were able to deal with these setbacks easily (43%, n=13) as were: optimistic; confident in their own strength and skills; and were able to cope with stress. Two of these clients were almost dismissive of setbacks, suggesting that they 'just got on with things'. However, seven clients (23%) indicated difficulties with coping with setbacks. Clients reported: losing confidence; not knowing where to seek help; feeling frustrated and stressed; and struggling emotionally.

These examples demonstrate how many are able to manage difficulties effectively and rationalise setbacks in their career because they are self-confident, motivated, engage with positive self-reflection, are adaptable; and have developed high levels of self-efficacy. For some clients, however, support to manage setbacks is required as they have the potential to hinder progress not only in their personal lives, but careers also.

### **3.5 Future plans**

As in previous years, clients' future plans, both their immediate (over the next 12 months) and longer-term, were explored as part of the interview. Clients' immediate plans were categorised as active (including active plans, where clients were proactively pursuing a course of action) and inactive (that is, where plans and ideas were not being followed through). The majority of clients (67%, n=20) were actively pursuing career plans. These included:

- applications to further and higher education;
- applications for a new job;
- completing a qualification and gaining employment;
- changing conditions of employment;
- addressing skill deficiencies;
- working towards a promotion;
- expanding business; and
- resigning from current employment.

However, eight clients (27%) were not actively pursuing plans or ideas. They were uncertain about their futures and were still considering options (employment, learning or travel opportunities). Four felt that their situation was unlikely to change over the next year, with many demonstrating pessimism regarding their futures.

Two clients (7%) trying to deal with the consequences of health issues, future plans were focused on seeking further help from specialist advisers and getting better.

Regarding longer term plans, ten clients (33%) discussed a range of possibilities, but did not seem set or determined on one particular path. Three (10%) expressed no ideas or plans for the longer term future. The remaining clients discussed a range of ideas, variously including:

- undertaking further and higher education (20%, n=6);
- changing/progressing in their career or job (53%, n=16);
- learning new skills (17%, n=5); and
- planning a family (3%, n=1).

Four clients (13%) expressed concerns regarding longer-term goals relating to finances, language barriers, local labour market conditions or being over qualified.

A significant number of clients (63%, n=19) expressed a need for help and guidance in the future to achieve their plans, specifically: applying to higher education; changing career or job; gaining more experience; seeking help with personal circumstances; focusing ideas; and discussing future employment possibilities.

Distinctive ways in which clients approached the decisions necessary to progress their careers emerged from the data and these will be described in the next section.

## **4. Career progression, decision making styles and barriers to employment**

Recent policy documents setting out the skills agenda for the UK have repeatedly emphasised the need for both young people and adults to be better informed about their options and to be supported in raising their aspirations (see Section 1.4 above). The process of using information about options to increase aspirations and progress careers is central to career decision making, which in turn is a central feature of the guidance process. Extending current understanding about the complexities of the career decision making process undoubtedly has the potential to improve the effectiveness of guidance services for adults, where practitioners delivering services are encouraged and supported to embed this understanding in their practice.

This section examines the different styles of decision making used by clients in this study to progress their career over a three year period, together with a review of barriers that have prevented a small number of participants from making any, or satisfactory, progress towards their career goal.

### **4.1 Career decision making styles**

Without a clear understanding of the different ways in which adults approach the career decision making process, there is a danger that practitioners will give information and advice to clients which they will find difficult to use. One influential study of career decision making, carried out by Harren (1979)<sup>23</sup> with college students, identified three styles of decision making:

- *rational*, where individual's adopted a logical and systematic approach to decisions;
- *intuitive*, where there was more reliance on internal affective states in decision making processes; and
- *dependent*, where decisions are contingent upon the reactions of friends, family, and peers.

The first two styles (rational and intuitive) involve individuals taking personal responsibility for decision making, whereas the third (dependent) involves projection of

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<sup>23</sup> Harren, V.A. (1979) A model of career decision making for college students. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 14, 2, 119-133.

responsibility onto significant others (e.g. parents, partner, etc.). However, the sample on which this typology was derived was restricted to college students and was conducted over three decades ago. The present longitudinal study has provided the opportunity to collect and analyse data from a sample of adults of different age ranges making transitions in different circumstances, both into and out of education, employment and training over a four year period (see Section 3.1).

Distinctive approaches to career decision making have emerged from the analysis of data collected from 26 clients (87%) interviewed for the third follow-up (four years into the study). This corresponds with Harren's (1997)<sup>24</sup> findings, with two of the three typologies similar in nature. It also collaborates and extends those identified from the second year follow-up of this study (three years into the study), where the same four styles emerged from the data. Data have permitted an expansion of these typologies, with more detailed descriptors of each developed (see sections 4.2 – 4.5 below). These styles are: evaluative; strategic; aspirational; and opportunistic. The stability of the typologies has now been examined over a two year period. The styles that emerged for individual participants during the second phase of investigation were tested against data collected for the third phase of investigation. In only one case was the style assigned in the second phase amended as a result of scrutiny of data from the third phase (from a strategic style to evaluative). Additionally, two clients who were experiencing barriers to progression in the second phase of the study are now espousing distinct career decision making strategies as a result of changed circumstances (both demonstrating opportunistic styles). These typologies are, however, tentative with the opportunity to test further the consistency and continuity with which individuals engage with these styles in the final year of the research investigation (see Appendix 2 for an explanation of how coding was used for this purpose).

Whilst the fourfold typology that has emerged from this study so far is tentative, it provides powerful insights to the different approaches adopted by clients in their attempts to navigate their way around the labour market. From this typology, it is also possible to reflect on some implications for the practice of careers guidance (Bimrose and Barnes, 2007)<sup>25</sup>. The typology is discussed below.

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<sup>24</sup> Op cit.

<sup>25</sup> Bimrose, J. and Barnes, S-A. (2007) Styles of Career Decision Making. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 16, 2, 20-28.

## 4.2 Evaluative careerists

Evaluative career decision making is best reflected in the psychological literature on social and emotional intelligence in which individuals possess a range of social and emotional competences. This approach exemplifies the notion that self-appraisal through the identification and evaluation of individual needs, values and abilities is central to career planning (Ball, 1996)<sup>26</sup>. Individuals using this form of decision making are undertaking a process of learning not only about themselves, but also about the consequences of their long term decisions. Through a process of self-reflection and evaluation, individuals become: more comfortable and confident in their decisions (Gati and Saka, 2001)<sup>27</sup>; aware of their particular skills (Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee, 2000; Gati and Saka, 2001)<sup>28</sup>; and are able to identify preferred outcomes and goals (Boyatzis et al., 2000)<sup>29</sup>. The career narratives of six of the research participants in the third year of follow-up demonstrate strong elements of this particular approach to career decision making. They had engaged with a process of critical self-reflection and self-evaluation that comprised periods (sometimes prolonged) of review and reflection. This could be construed as prevarication or indecision. Ultimately, however, the process resulted in decisions that potentially contributed to a longer term career goal. However, a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity was evident throughout because there was always the probability that the process of reflection might indicate a different future.

Six participants in this research illustrate this approach to career decision making. One example relates to a client who was taking the first steps in thinking about returning to work following a personal upheaval. She is a single parent in receipt of benefits. In her one-to-one career guidance session in the first year of this study, it became clear that she wanted to take up learning opportunities, but was constrained both by the timing of courses (which had to fit with school hours) and difficult financial constraints which had occurred as a result of a marriage break-down. The career guidance interview explored her circumstances and future employment aspiration to enrol on a vocational training course. After the interview, she had been unable to achieve her primary career goal of

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<sup>26</sup> Ball, B. (1996) *Assessing Your Career: Time for Change?* Leicester: British Psychological Society, Blackwall.

<sup>27</sup> Gati, I. and Saka, N. (2001) High school students' career-related decision making difficulties. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 79, 3, 331-340.

<sup>28</sup> Boyatzis, R., Goleman, D. and Rhee, K. (2000) Clustering competence in emotional intelligence: Insights from the emotional competence inventory. In R. Bar-On and J. Parker (Eds.) *Handbook of Emotional Intelligence* (pp. 343-362). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.; and Op cit.

<sup>29</sup> Op cit.

vocational training because of its lack of availability locally, together with child-care responsibilities and financial difficulties arising from her marriage break-down. As an alternative, she opted to enrol on an adult education course. Although this had not been her first choice, through a process of evaluation and self-reflection she was able to recognise that this had not only had a positive impact on her self-confidence, but had also helped her to understand that she 'loved learning'. After successful completion of the adult education course and as a direct result of this realisation, she had, therefore, applied for a course at her local higher education course because this fits in with her childcare responsibilities:

*I mean I only applied for the one, because I thought there's no way I'm going to be travelling anywhere. You know, I've got (daughter) to think about and all the rest of it. So I'm going for my local one, which is (university name) and obviously I've had all the letters back saying, "Yes, fine, let us know for sure by May".*

[Interview 2]

In the longer term, however, she remains somewhat uncertain about her ultimate career goal, with teaching one option she is considering.

A second example is provided by a graduate who had been employed for three years in administration with a small finance company and had become very disillusioned with his job. A process of reflection brought him to the decision that he wanted to change his career, but that there were practical issues to overcome. He had a mortgage on his house, so had financial commitments he had to meet. He wanted to remain in the same geographical area and he did not drive, so was dependent on public transport. After completing a psychometric test, he started to explore his options and invested much holiday entitlement in a thorough process of job search (including visiting possible employers). This eventually became a frustrating process as he was unable to spend the time needed in researching and applying for alternative jobs. Weighing all his constraints and options carefully, he then decided that he wanted to train for teaching. After researching this possibility thoroughly, he decided it was financially and practically feasible. He therefore applied for teacher training and was accepted on a training course. However, a few months into the training course, he decided that teaching was not the right choice and left:

*I had the half term in the spring and...I kind of realised that...everybody I knew was doing office work...it's just a sort of demanding job...when I was off, everybody else was working...I just thought, you know, 'Do I really want to do this for the rest of my life?'...also I was having to get into debt to do the teaching*

*anyway, so I thought, well if I quit now then I can avoid getting into another couple of thousand pounds worth of debt.*

[Interview 26]

He returned to working in the finance sector and has had a quick promotion from deputy manager to manager. Regarding his approach to career progression, he recognised his tendency to make decisions, reflect on them and then change his mind:

*I tend to regret decisions I've made a lot of the time, say: "Oh why did I do that?" But I don't overly focus on it. I mean at the end of the day, you know, what's done is done and you can't go back and change it. So I try and learn for the future...*

[Interview 26]

This on-going process of learning from evaluative self-reflective that is characteristic of this career decision making style is closely linked to the development of greater levels of self-awareness and self-knowledge, with individuals using this as the basis for future action and decisions.

In summary, this style of decision making is characterised by:

- a recurrent and ongoing process of critical self-reflection;
- critical self-appraisal as a key concept;
- the identification and evaluation of individual needs, values and abilities;
- learning about self and the consequences of decisions; and
- increasing confidence, over time, with individuals becoming more aware of their particular skills and more able to identify career goals.

#### **4.3 Strategic careerists**

Representing a more focused career decision making style, a second approach to career decision making is a strategic approach which is based on cognitive processing. Here, an individual bases their choices on a process of analysing, synthesizing, weighing up advantages and disadvantages, and setting plans to achieve goals. Through this process, decisions are primarily based on rational conditions (Baron, 2000)<sup>30</sup>. Individuals using this style of processing information and making decisions are competent in understanding a problem, considering and reflecting on options, and, perhaps more importantly, focusing on one particular solution (Sampson, Reardon,

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<sup>30</sup> Baron, J. (2000) *Thinking and Deciding* (3rd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Peterson and Lenz, 1999)<sup>31</sup>. This particular approach is essentially the same as the 'rational' style identified by Harren (1979)<sup>32</sup>.

All of the clients in the study who exemplified this approach to career decision making (that is, seven in the third year follow-up) were focused on finding a career direction or a new focus. They had identified their ultimate career goal and were making quite conscious career decisions that were directly related to formal employment and designed to contribute to achieving their long term objective. Strategic careerists are committed to 'moving on' and see their careers as something they actively construct. Typically, they believe that their current position, and/or organisational attachment, represents just one phase of a career that involves relatively frequent changes and are reconciled to the need to adapt and update their skills, knowledge and understanding constantly. For instance, one client had decided that she eventually wanted to run her own business after seeing the impact of working for a large, impersonal organisation on her brother. She targeted various smaller companies at a career fair for graduate employment and accepted one of the three jobs offered. Then she manoeuvred herself in different sections of her employing organisation at six monthly intervals, as she had worked out that exposure to varied employment contexts would provide her with the necessary preparation and skill development for realising her long-term career ambition of running her own business.

*I win business and provide the service they need and get repeat business...which I think are really important skills if I want to run my own business eventually. So when I feel that I'm not learning any more and I can do the job with my eyes shut, then I will sort of move on*

[Interview 6]

This tenacious approach to working towards her ultimate goal is combined with the acceptance that success will require concerted effort on her part:

*I guess I need to grasp the job a lot more...I want to be successful and I will work really hard to try and achieve that...*

[Interview 6]

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<sup>31</sup> Sampson, J.P., Reardon, R.C., Peterson, G.W. and Lenz, J.G. (2004) *Career Counselling and Services: A Cognitive Information Processing Approach*. Belmont, CA.: Brooks/Cole – Thomson Learning.

<sup>32</sup> Op cit.

One other example is a client who, at the time of his career guidance interview, was working as the acting sales manager for a newspaper. He felt he was not being rewarded for the extra responsibility this involved and seemed generally discontent with his work. Before his careers interview, he had undertaken a considerable amount of research into alternative careers and had become very focused on becoming a Physiotherapist. To achieve this, he gave up his well-paid job and started to study a science-based access to higher education course on a full-time basis, together with related evening classes. In parallel with gaining the academic qualifications he required, he was also undertaking relevant work experience. His application for a physiotherapy degree was successful. He was clearly determined to achieve his goal, had assessed the risks and had set about maximising his chances of succeeding in what is a highly competitive occupational environment.

*I'm trying to keep an open mind, because there are so many different areas you could go into...a lot of the stuff we do at the moment is neurological and respiratory...you know, intensive care, multiple injury unit...stroke and Parkinsons and what-not. There's a huge amount of physio work involved in those areas...the report I got back from my placement...was along the lines of if there was a job going now, they'd be happy to offer it...sort of thing.*

[Interview 45]

This type of rational decision making style has been found to be beneficial in helping career undecided women make occupational and educational choices (Tinsley, Tinsley and Rushing, 2002)<sup>33</sup>. This appears to be the case for one woman in the study. She had established herself in a successful career (in information technology) before leaving to bring up her family. In planning her return to the labour market, she assessed her options and decided that self-employment represented the best because it allowed her to reconcile child-care responsibilities with her own career development needs. She decided, therefore, to train for garden design, with the intention of setting up as self-employed. This illustrates how strategic careerists make decisions based on rational choices. Once a goal has been determined, this becomes the primary focus, driving future action and decisions.

In summary, this style of decision making is characterised by:

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<sup>33</sup> 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.

- engagement with cognitive processing of facts and feelings – analysis and synthesis – on a continuous basis;
- rational appraisal of information as the basis for action;
- steadfast focus on a career goal together with the belief in their ability to produce the desired outcomes;
- a tendency to marginalise emotions and their ‘emotional self’ in their decision-making;
- well developed problem solving skills – the ability to circumvent difficulties that impede progress; and
- predisposition to planning and planfulness.

The two remaining styles of career decision making that have emerged from the research data relate to those participants who have distant career goals and those who remain largely undecided.

#### **4.4 Aspirational careerists**

Unlike clients engaged in strategic career decision making, three clients participating in the third year follow-up were pursuing interim goals which seemed almost tangential to the ultimate career aspiration, yet for them represented relevant preparation. Aspirational careerists adopt a style of career decision making based on focused, but distant career goals and their career decisions are inextricably intertwined with personal circumstances and priorities. They will take jobs to get by – that is, provide the necessary finance, which become a means to an end. Interim goals are sometimes, but not necessarily related to formal employment and achieving their ultimate career goals is definitely ‘work in progress’.

One client established in a highly successful career in retail management, became dissatisfied and determined to change direction. However, before she is ready to re-train for her aspirational career goal, other important issues in her life need resolution. Currently, for example, she is focused on securing her financial future. Then it appears likely that she will get married and start a family, before applying herself to re-focusing her career and achieving her ultimate career goal:

*I’m just beginning to think about a career...*

[Interview 5]

One other client has a degree in fine art and aspired to work that would provide scope to use his creative energies. First, he wanted to be an artist and sell his paintings. He took a job as a media technician in a local school as he needed a source of income on which to live. After becoming bored with this job, he resigned without having an alternative. He took a job in a pub: 'just to pay the bills'. This lasted for only a few months, after which he spent about a year unemployed: 'signed on'. Then his father fell ill, so he took a temporary data entry administrative job that paid well, but which he described as: 'mind numbingly boring'. This was to save his father from having to worry about him as it provides the financial support he needs to paint for about thirty hours a week. He still hoped to make a viable living from selling his work. After a few months he left this job and took a permanent administration job with a roof tiling company. He described this in exactly the same way as his previous administrative job: 'mind numbingly boring', and plans to resign:

*I'd be letting myself down if I wasn't being creative, which is what is happening now. I'm letting myself down completely and I don't really care about money, or jobs, or things like that. I really care about whether I'm actually producing anything...if I'm not, it worries me, because I think it's something you can lose...  
...I'm thirty one and I've not got the drive I had when I was a child...*

[Interview 37]

He had switched his career focus from painting pictures to writing:

*I'm kind of disillusioned by painting in a way. I'd much prefer to write. A lot of me comes out when I write. Painting is something... ...I can't beat the one I've just done... ...I really can't get anything to look as good as that.*

[Interview 37]

His current plans are to 'take off' with a friend to the West Country to pursue his dreams and to find a lifestyle that suits him.

In summary, this approach to decision making is characterised by:

- the tendency to identify vaguely focused, but distant goals (personal and/or career);
- aspiring towards career goals that are often highly competitive and/or challenging to achieve;
- a career journey that typically involves (often considerable) material sacrifice; and

- individual circumstances and priorities that impinge on the overall process – with the heart typically ruling the head.

#### 4.5 Opportunistic careerists

The final style of career decision making describes those individuals who have taken opportunities that have presented themselves, however unexpected, and tried (often successfully) to turn them to their advantage. Opportunist careerists have a very different approach to career decision making compared to the other three styles explored above. They exploit available opportunities rather than make active choices about work (see for example Banks, Bates, Breakwell, Bynner, Emler, Jamieson and Roberts, 1992)<sup>34</sup>. Clients' career plans could seem vague, undecided and uncertain. This resonates with the concept of 'planned happenstance' that encourages us to be receptive to randomly occurring opportunities that could be critical in shaping our careers (Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz, 1999;<sup>35</sup> Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996<sup>36</sup>; Hambly, 2007<sup>37</sup>) and the need for practitioners to place greater importance on context (Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld and Bell, 2005)<sup>38</sup>. Ten research participants in the third year follow-up displayed this pattern of decision making behaviour, which has certain similarities with Harren's (1979) 'intuitive' decision making style.

One example of a client applying this style of career decision making is that of a graduate student. Three years after her career guidance interview she was still unsure of her career direction. After completing her degree, she had worked abroad for six months as a beauty therapist:

*I just decided to go abroad. I'd been offered this job in Greece for six months over the summer season...*

[Interview 27]

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<sup>34</sup> Banks, M., Bates, I., Breakwell, G., Bynner, J., Emler, N., Jamieson, L. and Roberts, K. (1992) *Careers and Identities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchell, K.E., Levin, A.S. and Krumboltz, J.D. (1999) Planned happenstance: constructing unexpected career opportunities. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 77, 2, 115-124.

<sup>36</sup> Hodkinson, P., Sparkes, A.C. and Hodkinson, H. (1996) *Triumphs and Tears: Young People, Markets and the Transition from School To Work*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

<sup>37</sup> Hambly, L. (2007) New theory: Implications for guidance practice. *Career Guidance Today* 15, 3, 30-33

<sup>38</sup> Bright, J.E.H., Pryor, R.G.L., Wilkenfeld, S. and Earl, J. (2005) The role of social context and serendipitous events in career decision making. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 5, 1, 19-36.

On her return home, she completed some further vocational qualifications in beauty therapy and sports massage to enhance her employability in complementary therapies. This led to her employment in a full-time job (in a women's prison) and in part-time employment (in a health spa). She continued to take full advantage of training opportunities (e.g. reflexology, computers, herbal therapy), but problems emerged in her full-time employment – she was made a supervisor very quickly, which has caused some problems with other members of staff. This made her unhappy and she became ill with work-related stress. She had several ideas about what she would like to do next, most involving travel abroad:

*...it's awful. I'm just thinking, New Zealand, Australia or America. I don't know really where I want to go. I don't know...I haven't got a clue. I'd go anywhere. I just want to find somewhere to go and I'll just go... ...I feel I'm a free spirit girl.*

[Interview 27]

Another example is of a client who was made redundant from her early-years teaching position in school after twenty years. She immediately undertook further training courses to enable her to retain a foothold in education (as a learning support assistant; as a workplace assessor; and training teaching assistants). To supplement her income, she also took a job as a waitress. She then applied for a series of part-time jobs, capitalising on opportunities that presented themselves through local networks. In addition to part-time contracts in teaching, she worked backstage in a theatre. The variety suited her and she recognised that she had 'always fallen into things by accident' by using personal contacts and 'being in the right place at the right time'. However, after three years of working in this way, she has begun to feel dissatisfied and restless:

*I just really don't know what I want. That's the problem. And I just feel I've got myself in this rut... ...I'm good at being a jack of all trades and master of none. I'm not very good at finishing off what I started... ...I suppose I'll do two or four years of it...I felt like chucking it in altogether this morning...*

[Interview 31]

Opportunistic careerists represent a very different style of behaviour and thought processes concerning career choices and decisions. Although opportunistic careerists often do not have a clear career goal, they are usually able to reconcile themselves with their employment situation, until a better option comes along. They deliberately keep their options open and delay decisions that may commit them. These individuals typically take what is available at a certain moment in time and there is a sense in which

they are chosen for different types of employment, rather than making proactive, strategic choices themselves.

In summary, this style of decision making is characterised by:

- the ability (often preference) to cope with high levels of uncertainty;
- reluctance to close off options;
- the use of intuition, rather than rationality, in making decisions (what feels 'right');
- a predisposition to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves unexpectedly;
- resistance (sometimes active) to planning; and
- flexibility of approach.

As indicated above (Section 4.3) strategic career decision-makers in this study are similar in their behaviour to Harren's (1997)<sup>39</sup> 'rationalists'. Harren argued that this rational style would result in the most effective careers decision and the dependent style was the least likely to lead to a fulfilling career. Scrutiny of the data from this study supports the view that the strategists are working – sometimes doggedly – towards their career goal. However, even the five year perspective of this study is insufficient to form robust judgements about whether they are, or are likely to be in the future, more fulfilled in their career destinations than others using different styles of decision making. Indeed, data collected from this study on career decision making styles, age, gender, highest qualification and employment data were examined, with no clear relationships emerging.

In addition to career decision making styles, the research data has allowed examination of the types of barriers prevent individuals from achieving their career ambitions. The next section considers barriers that have operated to prevent four of the research participants from making any satisfactory career progress, with a tentative exploration of some implications for guidance practice.

#### **4.6 Barriers to career progression**

Assumptions about how individuals get jobs, keep jobs and change jobs influence the approach that is adopted in guidance practice. There are many models that attempt to explain how individuals get jobs (see for example, Sharf, 1997<sup>40</sup>) but two in particular

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<sup>39</sup> Op cit.

<sup>40</sup> Sharf, R.S. (1997) *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling*. Pacific Grove: California: Brooks/Cole.

have arguably had a significant impact on the delivery of guidance practice in the UK. These place distinctively different emphases on which factors are the most important for career progression. They each also indicate a different focus for the guidance interview.

One of these models focuses on individual attributes and the matching of interests, abilities, aptitudes, achievements and values to educational, training or labour market opportunities. Although developed about a century ago, this 'matching' approach has been a dominant influence on careers guidance practice. Its originator (Parsons, 1909)<sup>41</sup> argued that occupational choices are made when people have achieved first, an accurate understanding of their individual traits; second, knowledge of jobs and the labour market; and third, made a rational and objective judgement about the relationship between these two groups of facts. The closer the match between personal characteristics and job requirements, then the greater is the likelihood for success, productivity and satisfaction. So the emphasis in the guidance interview is to help individuals assess their skills, abilities, aptitudes and achievements, for these to be 'matched' to the best fit job, training or educational opportunity. In practice, this approach lends itself comfortably to the formulation of 'action plans', or 'summaries of guidance', where typically clients and practitioners agree a career goal and the plan of action necessary to take this forward at the end of the guidance interview. Importantly, individuals are assumed to have the autonomy they need to achieve their career goals.

The significant and continuing influence of this approach on the practice of careers guidance is generally accepted and recognised (e.g. Krumboltz, 1994<sup>42</sup>; Savickas, 1997<sup>43</sup>). However, the model contains serious flaws. One is that the approach is based on the assumption that all human behaviour is essentially rational with individual decisions based on objective, scientific facts. Another is the way this approach tends to neglect the context in which the individual client is making their decisions. In so doing, it marginalises the impact of constraints to career progression that are 'external' to the individual (that is, beyond their control), like ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual preference; disability, etc.

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<sup>41</sup> Parsons, F. (1909) *Choosing a Vocation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>42</sup> Krumboltz, J.D. (1994) Improving career development theory from a social learning perspective, in Savickas, M.L. and Lent, R.L. (Eds) *Convergence in Career Development Theories* (pp. 9-31). Palo Alto, California: CPP Books.

<sup>43</sup> Savickas, M.L. (1997) Constructivist career counseling: models and methods. *Advances in Personal Construct Psychology* 4, 2, 149-182.



In contrast, the second explanatory model places a particular emphasis on external constraints and the ways in which they restrict, even determine, individual choice. Such constraints include: socio-economic status; the environment; educational and training opportunities; gender, ethnic origin, age; disability; peer groups and labour markets (i.e. job opportunities). In this approach to career progression and development, guidance would need to focus on helping individuals manage problems caused by these external barriers. The guidance interview would typically be centred on an individual's immediate problems and services would concentrate on developing good information, placement, follow-up services as well as advocacy on behalf of the client with, for example, employers or training providers. As with the first model outlined above, this approach to guidance has its weaknesses. In particular, it marginalises the importance of individuals in the choice process, regarding them as having little, or no, impact on the shaping of their own destinies.

Throughout this research, a number of participants have talked about barriers and constraints to their progression. In the second year follow-up, four types of barriers to career progression were identified as affecting nine of these participants. The sets of circumstances that resulted in the labour market marginalisation of the research participants trying to deal with them were: health problems; local labour markets, childcare responsibilities; and financial constraints. Clients grappling with these problems regarded these barriers as insurmountable and felt disengaged from the labour market. Further details of the barriers experienced can be found in a previous report from this study (Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes, 2006)<sup>44</sup>.

In this third year follow-up, four were still feeling constrained (or immobilised) by such barriers. The five other clients who had identified barriers in earlier stages of the research had either overcome their barrier (e.g. the child of one client with childcare responsibility had started school) or dropped out of the research study. Of the four remaining, two were suffering from serious and continuing health care problems and the other two (both males) had both been made redundant from industries in which they had been employed for significant time periods and had found it impossible to find employment – both reported that this was because of their age (46 and 50 years) and their lack of relevant skills and qualifications.

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<sup>44</sup> Op cit.

Clients perceptions of the role of guidance in progressing careers three years after the interview took place, are presented in the next section. Additionally, details are provided of any further advice and guidance received, with views relating to the potential role of guidance support. Finally, section five provides an overview of career management competencies demonstrated by participants in this study.

## **5. Client reflections on guidance**

Throughout this study the effectiveness of guidance, from the perspective of the client, has been explored. Forty-nine of the 50 clients reported that the guidance received (during the case study interview) had been useful, immediately after the event. This has diminished slightly over the period of the study with 39 of the 45 (87%) clients successfully contacted one year on still regarding their case study interview as useful and 26 of the 36 clients (72%) contacted two years on. The client who had expressed a negative opinion about the guidance she received during the first phase of data collection was, two years on, identifying elements of the guidance that was useful and had acted on advice received.

This section explores clients' reflections on their initial guidance and examines the recurrent themes regarding what is considered useful. Clients were also asked what they thought guidance should do and an analysis of responses follows. Finally, client career management competences developed over the period of the study are discussed.

### **5.1 Useful guidance, three years on**

Three years on, 77 per cent of clients (n=23) still considered the guidance they received during the case study interview as useful. Of the remaining seven clients followed up, two (7%) were less sure about the usefulness of the guidance received and five (17%) could no longer recollect the guidance they had received sufficiently to feel able to comment on its usefulness.

As in previous follow-up interviews, clients' perceptions about useful guidance were explored. Emerging themes were consistent with those highlighted previously. Clients defined guidance as useful when it:

- challenges ideas and understanding;
- inspires self- confidence and understanding of self;
- gives direction, focus or a plan for the future;
- provides access to information, knowledge and computer aided guidance programmes (CAG); and
- provides structured opportunities for discussion with a professional.

Some examples of clients' reflections on the guidance they received follow.

One client could not recollect the details of the guidance interview, but does remember the sense of confidence it instilled and an increased awareness of the opportunities available to him:

*I think it was, because it was the first time that I kind of thought about trying something different. that was kind of the point where I realised that you had other possibilities, other than just starting a job and carrying on into that job and sticking at it and just doing the same old thing. And it has always allowed me to think that if this career option doesn't work, there is always the ability to go back and change and go down a completely different avenue, which I have also thought about a couple of times over the last few years... ..it's great that in England you have this facility there for us for free.*

[Interview 1]

For others, guidance had challenged their ideas and understanding about themselves, as well as providing insights to their own skills and the employment and learning opportunities available to them (20%, n=6). One client felt he had been challenged into considering other employment options:

*Brilliant, yeah I reckon I do yeah, because at the end of the day if I wouldn't have got there [to IAG organisation], I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now, it's as simple as that...and I thought it was brilliant, I'd give them 110 out of 100!*

[Interview 23]

Another observed:

*It sort of got me thinking about the types of things I might be interested in and it got me sort of looking at proper careers and jobs at the time, when I was really unsure of anything I wanted to do, to be honest.*

[Interview 21]

Others felt that the guidance had confirmed their thinking. For instance:

*I think it really confirmed what I already thought in a way.*

[Interview 26]

For many clients (27%, n=8), there was recognition that the guidance was useful as it had inspired them with confidence in themselves and through a process of self-reflection clients had gained a better understanding of themselves, their skills and their abilities.

One client gained confidence in her skills and a greater awareness of what she needed:

*And it also helped me understand why I won't just sit doing very repetitive work, because I'm just not suited to it. And in some ways I think it's quite a quality to be able to do that, because a lot of jobs are like that...he said that to me, "You're just not suited to that, you're always looking to the next thing." I sometimes get this thing out [CAG results] and I think, "Come on, you can do better than this!". You know, I reflect on it a bit.*

[Interview 29]

For another, receiving guidance had helped her make a decision and gave her confidence:

*Giving confidence, confidence building in that way... ..The information that was provided helped me make up my mind and what I wanted. I think to be able to talk to somebody and get the information really.*

[Interview 38]

Useful guidance also gave clients direction, focus and/or a future plan (33%, n=10). One felt that his experience of guidance had not only given him confidence in his plan, but also pointed him in the right direction:

*This was another avenue that you could take, other people had taken it, it's successful for other people and I suppose that's just what I wanted to hear. That was the final sort of nudger. I'd been playing with the idea for a while and I'd got the support of my family... ..so yeah, I just wanted to make sure I wasn't barking up the wrong tree or dreaming really... that I could actually do this job that I really fancied doing, rather than carrying on doing a job I really didn't enjoy...she [the practitioner] was there to guide me and just to give me that final bit of confidence that it could be done and why not, you know, and obviously she pointed me in the right direction to start with.*

[Interview 45]

Clients reflected on how the guidance had: clarified and confirmed plans; helped focus their ideas; and helped set out a plan to achieve goals. Providing access to information, knowledge and computer aided guidance programmes (CAG) was reported to be useful by 43% of clients (n=13). This included:

- tailored advice;
- information on different options and their consequences;
- information on requirements for different courses; and
- contacts to follow-up for employment opportunities.

A few clients still felt that guidance was useful as it had structured an opportunity to talk to a professional and reflect on their situation (10%, n=3). Clients remembered the guidance practitioner as helpful, supportive, easy to talk to and empathic.

## **5.2 Further advice and guidance**

In addition to the initial guidance received, clients have also reported receiving further advice and guidance from a variety of sources:

- 73% (n=22) of clients had received advice from personal networks (including family members, friends, other students and work colleagues);
- 57% (n=17) of clients had received advice from another professional (including tutors and a life coach);
- 10% (n=3) had received further guidance from an IAG practitioner.

Personal and professional networks were being used by clients to: gain affirmation of ideas and plans; illicit support and help; and access required information. Personal networks were also used extensively as 'sounding boards' for ideas.

Five clients (17%) reported that the further advice and guidance they had received over the last year was useful as it had clarified direction and focus, plus provided an opportunity to review work and learning opportunities. However, five clients (17%) felt that further help and guidance had failed as: agreed action had not been followed up; inadequate advice and information had been given; and participation in an employment programme had not met expectations.

Six clients (20%) reported that they were unsure where to seek further help advice and guidance. Three of the clients said that they needed further help to focus their ideas and progress their plans.

## **5.3 What should guidance do?**

There is strong evidence to suggest that clients value the guidance received with the majority defining it as useful. As part of the three years on follow-up, clients were asked whether, in light of their own experiences, they thought guidance was important/useful, and what they thought it should do, ideally. The majority believed guidance to be important/useful (77%, n=23), with only four (13%) not certain of its role. One client did not think guidance was important, suggesting that it is up to the individual to make changes and decisions:

*It's hard to say really, because at the end of the day, you know, it doesn't matter what people tell you, or how they help you, it's up to you isn't it, to make the differences and to make the changes I think.*

[Interview 31]

Client expectations about the role of guidance were explored. It was felt that guidance should:

- provide access to expertise and information (including help with CV writing, LMI, local knowledge of employment and education opportunities) (53%, n=16);
- agree action and follow-up to help with decision making (50%, n=15);
- encourage the consideration of different options by challenging and helping to generate ideas (30%, n=9);
- allow time to talk to a professional (20%, n=6);
- undertake an assess of a client's situation (for example, access to public transport, ability to drive and skill levels) (17%, n=5); and
- enable access to Computer Aided Guidance and psychometric testing (13%, n=4).

Four clients (13%) believed that more guidance should be made available and that it should be accessible to all age groups.

One client valued guidance for the insights to the labour market:

*I mean obviously it depends on the individual and what you want to do, but I think sort of nowadays more than ever really, you know, because there's so much out there and it's so competitive to get into certain things that, you know, you do need someone who's an expert, or someone's who's got the background in it and could put you in touch with the right people definitely... ...it's kind of like a central point where you can go to get information about how to get into different various industries and whatever, because if you just try and do it yourself on the internet, or whatever, you're kind of overwhelmed with information. Whereas I suppose it's careers guidance, but like filtered out a lot of the junk for you and help you focus on the specifics.*

[Interview 26]

For another, guidance provided occupational information about what the job entails. It was assumed that practitioners visited workplaces to gain this knowledge firsthand:

*Just like going through what the job entails, what you're going to have to study for, all the work and effort that needs to go into, you know, the study. I think people need to be aware of that... ..I mean obviously the money and everything, they go through like the general salaries you would expect to get after about a year's experience in the job or 5 years, that's interesting to know...knowing more about the actual job itself... ..I don't know whether they [careers practitioners] have time to sit around and sort of, you know, go into a workplace and see how the job is done and actually see it for themselves how the job's done.*

[Interview 38]

Overall, clients were very positive about the importance of guidance for adults and its potential in developing career trajectories and supporting career decisions.

#### **5.4 Developing career management competences**

Over the period of the study, clients have demonstrated the development and acquisition of career management competencies, which have played an important role for many in exploring employment and learning opportunities, finding employment, increasing their self-confidence and making careers-related decisions. These competences have been explored in the follow-up interviews. For many, researching opportunities and developing certain skills were not regarded specifically as career management competences. Many either misunderstood or had no understanding of the term 'career management competences' and researchers had to be more explicit in their questions. Yet once explained, most were able to talk about and/or reflect upon their career management competences, which had developed over the period of the study (77%, n=23). Most attributed these competences to the guidance received. These competences comprise:

- researching employment and/or course requirements;
- seeking employment, education and/or training opportunities;
- understanding labour market conditions;
- writing CV and/or job applications;
- interviewing skills;
- reflecting upon options and decisions (with others);
- demonstrating confidence in career decisions; and
- using, effectively, networking and communication skills.



The following examples illustrate clients' confidence in their competences and skills to explore, research, reflect and choose the opportunities available to them:

*To be honest I think I'd do a lot of my own research first as to what I'd be capable of achieving and what options there were open to me. I'm working in recruitment myself, I've got a fair idea of, you know, the way in works and what these sort of people look for. I mean with regard to sort of moving careers... ..but I'd definitely sort of pursue my own sort of careers advice first. I mean I'd sort of look at websites and what I could do and have a really good think.*

[Interview 6]

*I think definitely the biggest thing I've learnt really is since I've become a manager, it's only recently that I've started doing interviews myself and reading people's CVs myself and it gives a totally different perspective on what people are looking for. So I think that if I came now to write my own CV again for a new job, or to go into an interview, I think I'd be a lot more confident...I think I've finally got used to the technique of interviews and how to sell myself and stuff like that.*

[Interview 26]

*I suppose one of the main things that I've learnt from kind of the last job, was that I work better with an outward facing role. You know, dealing with different people all the time and I think, going back to my interview from three years ago, that was one of the things that came out. You know, working with people, you know, different people all the time as opposed to, you know, working inward facing...the new role is that and I enjoy it so much more, because I get to see people all the time, speak to different people, help people and that's kind of what was missing from before.*

[Interview 41]

It is evident that such competences have supported clients' career trajectories over the last four years and that for many, guidance had played a role in their development.

## **6. Conclusions and issues arising**

### **Researching effective guidance**

The qualitative methodology used for this five year longitudinal study has continued to yield rich and deep insights into the effectiveness of guidance for adults over a four year period. The complexity of isolating variables that impact on successful career development is evident, though there is clearly merit identifying the clients' perceptions of important variables and the role that guidance has played in their career narrative.

### **Attrition rate of client participants**

Three years after the initial case studies of effective guidance interviews, thirty of the original fifty clients were interviewed. The low attrition rate for research participants in this study has, therefore, continued with an overall follow-up rate of 60 per cent from the original sample of 50 participants. Of the 36 clients interviewed for the two year follow-up, 30 (83%) were successfully contacted.

### **Three years on: career changes, perceptions of career and career resilience**

The proportion of clients who have entered full-time employment over the period since the case study interview has increased from 22 per cent (that is, 11 of the client participants in 2003/04) to 53 per cent (that is, 16 of the client participants in 2006/07). However, several clients (30%, n=9) have experienced significant changes in their personal life which have prompted a re-evaluation of priorities, career goals and employment. When asked about perceptions of 'career', equal numbers thought that they did, and did not, currently have a career (23%, n=7). A further 37 per cent (n=11) felt that they were still working towards a career. Nine clients (30%) demonstrated career resilience, being able to cope with challenges that arose in relation to their career advancement in a constructive and purposeful manner.

### **Career decision making styles**

The centrality of career decision making to career advancement is widely acknowledged. A fourfold typology developed from the analysis of data for the third report was tested and found to be stable over the period of a year. Clients were still operating strategic, evaluative, aspirational or opportunistic styles of career decision making. The typology has been explored and developed, with the final year of investigation providing a further opportunity to test further. This typology has implications for enhancing guidance services, where practitioners and their managers

need to be supported in applying an understanding of the implications of different styles of decision making in their practice.

### **Barriers to career progression**

Four clients who participated in this fourth year of study were still experiencing barriers to progression which had prevented their making any significant progress. Two were suffering from severe and persistent health issues. The remaining two were finding that their outdated skills no longer provided them with any leverage in the labour market. Both males in their middle age, they had been made redundant from industrial sectors in which they had been employed all of their working lives. Over a number of years, neither had found the services offered by employment and guidance agencies effective in supporting their re-entry. They both felt let down by the system.

### **Useful guidance**

A high proportion of clients still regarded their guidance interviews useful three years on: 77 per cent (n=23) of the 30 clients successfully contacted. Seven per cent of clients (n=2) were, however, less sure of its usefulness, whilst 17 per cent (n=5) of clients could no longer remember the guidance they had received. Consistent with findings from the previous follow-up interviews, guidance is regarded as useful when it: challenged ideas and understanding; inspired self-confidence; increased self-awareness; gave direction, focus or a plan for the future; provided access to information, knowledge and computer aided guidance programmes; and structured opportunities to talk to a professional.

### **Guidance for adults**

There is strong evidence to suggest that clients value the guidance received with the majority defining it as useful (77%, n=23). A significant number of clients expressed a need for help and guidance in achieving their plans in the future. Specifically, this was required to help with: applying to higher education; changing career or job; gaining more experience; seeking help with personal circumstances; focusing ideas; and discussing future employment possibilities.

Overall, research findings from this fourth phase of the investigation highlight the complex interaction of individuals' private lives with education, learning, work and worklessness as these unfold and develop over time. Crucially, data illuminate tactics adopted by individuals as they navigate their way into and through the labour market, together with the role of guidance in supporting these transitions. Shifts in the

workplace, changing aspirations of individuals, differences in career decision making styles, alongside the strong influence of guidance in supporting individuals' journeys are dominant and consistent themes emerging from the data. In the UK, key policy aims currently include working towards three particular goals: greater labour market flexibility; up-skilling of the workforce; and the reduction of social exclusion. The adult guidance policy landscape in England is currently under review. New structures and delivery arrangements are being considered by policy makers and stakeholders that are intended to strengthen current service provision. Key to the effective delivery of the new services will be an understanding on the part of practitioners and their managers of adaptable models of career progression which support learning and work.

## Appendix 1: Three years on follow-up interview proforma

### CASE STUDY RESEARCH INTO EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE

#### PHASE 3 YEAR 3 (2006-2007)

##### Interview Proforma

###### Introduction:

Secure participant's consent to record the interview.

"We're really interested to find out about how you've been getting on since we talked last year. "

###### 1. Current situation and changes:

Check their situation and probe life changes and changes in their circumstances (i.e. caring responsibilities, change of location, financial difficulties and/or health problems).

Have there been any changes in their circumstances?

Have they undertaken any work experience/educational taster courses/voluntary work/job shadowing etc.?

- Probe influence of these short formal interventions on their situation and subsequent decisions

###### 2. Career development and changes over the last 12 months:

Pick up and question any plans that clients talked about doing in the year 2 follow-up. For example, are they:

- on a training course;
- in education;
- in employment (full-time or part-time);
- unemployed (on benefits or not);
- undertaking voluntary work;
- on work placement experience;
- redundant;
- full-time caring commitments;
- suffering from ill health (nature?);
- promoted since you spoke last year; and
- in receipt of a pay rise.

###### 3. Reflections on initial guidance interview (case study) and further guidance:

Referring back to the initial case study interview, check whether:

- they have had any further formal guidance. If so, probe this (precise nature/usefulness, etc.); or
- whether they still think their initial guidance interview was useful

#### **4. Further help and support in achieving career goals:**

Have they been to see a practitioner (use the appropriate language, according to the context in which the client received their case study interview) over the last year?

- Probe where, who and when
- Probe usefulness, information gained and whether any action was agreed

Would they consider seeing a practitioner again in the future?

Want additional help or information do they need over the next year to help with their career/goals/plans/action?

That is, what further support/help is needed by the clients?

#### **5. What should guidance do?**

Do they think (careers) guidance is important/useful?

- If no, ask to explain.
- If yes, in what ways (i.e. help plan and/or set goals, help with decision making, find information, help with CV/job application writing, advocate, review strengths, weakness, skills and abilities, point in right direction, identify action)

What are their expectations about guidance?

#### **6. Client self-reflection and developing career management skills:**

What have they learnt about themselves since their careers guidance interview with and subsequent follow-up guidance (if applicable)?

How do they feel/think they have changed?

- increase confidence in self;
- increased confidence in skills;
- greater understanding of options available to them;
- awareness of abilities; and
- understanding of likes and dislikes.

What new skills do they think they have learnt? (i.e. probe acquisition of career management skills)

- related to new qualification;
- communication;
- cv/application writing;
- job search or research skills; and
- self-reflection.

Do they think of themselves as having a 'career'?

#### **7. Decision making, influences and constraints:**

How do they make decisions about their career/future?

Do they reflect upon these decisions and/or make plans?

Have they had access to any alternative sources of advice (e.g. informal networks/informal interventions/short formal interventions/unofficial sources)? That is, who or what influence their career decisions:

- family?
- friends?
- colleagues/employer?
- career guidance practitioner?
- other professional (who)?
- health?
- lack of finances or financial responsibilities?
- transport?
- caring commitments?

If appropriate, probe what has prevented them from following their career choices?

How do they overcome or manage these barriers/constraints? For example:

- How do you cope with set-backs?
- When things go wrong, who might you turn to?
- When things are going well, who might you tell?

Do they think they could have done anything differently?

### **8. Plans for the next year:**

Find out in detail what the client plans to do over the next year.

What are their next steps in terms of their career?

Do they anticipate any future problems or barriers to overcome?

In two years, where would they like to be, or what would they like to be doing?

## Appendix 2: Coding the data

The software package QSR NVivo 2 has been used throughout this longitudinal study to code data. Its main function is to allow the coding and retrieval of data. In qualitative research, coding is analysis. It serves to organise the data that has been collected and also represents the first step in the conceptualisation of data. Unlike quantitative research, analysis in qualitative research is not a separate phase – rather it is an integral part of the ongoing investigation. Adopting this particular approach to analysis in this study has enabled the dissection of data to be undertaken in a way that has kept the relationships between the parts intact. Further, it has allowed both the differentiation, and combination, of data with the development of researcher reflections on the possible meanings. Codes are simply the tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information collected during the study<sup>45</sup>. They are typically attached to chunks of data of varying size (for example, words, phrases, sentences or even whole paragraphs) and can take the form of a straightforward category label (for example, a closed question) or a more complex concept (for example, different approaches to making career decisions). In the first phase of investigation, coding was used to develop a typology of guidance in action, identifying four main stages of the guidance interview, together with some forty sub-categories of interventions (Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes and Orton, 2004<sup>46</sup>). In this phase of the investigation, coding has again been used extensively to identify emerging themes in clients' career trajectories and to develop a typology of career decision making styles across the interview data from the twenty-six research participants who were demonstrating progress in their career development (see sections 4.1 to 4.5, above)<sup>47</sup>. For details of the codes used in this study, please see Appendix 3 (page 51).

In developing the typology on career decision making, the interview text from the twenty-six participants was categorised using codes that were drawn inductively from the text. This process involved embedding words, phrases or sentences within a conceptual framework, according to a particular logic developed by the researchers around career decision making. These codes highlighted characteristic features of four distinctive approaches to career decision making that had emerged during the second phase of

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<sup>45</sup> See Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc. for a fuller discussion of the use of codes.

<sup>46</sup> Op cit

<sup>47</sup> The four remaining participants were feeling constrained or immobilized by various barriers to employment, so data from their interviews was not relevant for the development of these particular codes.



investigation. Initially, one researcher worked alone. A second researcher then worked independently, checking codes assigned. The third stage in the process of validation comprised an external moderator sampling six interview scripts (23%) to evaluate the efficacy of the coding process. To create a meaningful and coherent understanding of 'career decision making styles' and to address the criticism that coding using a software package can only signpost data as it breaks up the text (Seale, 1999<sup>48</sup> and Kelle, 1997<sup>49</sup>), care was taken to code sections of text. Therefore, rather than breaking up the text and coding specific words or phrases, larger sections of text were coded using the most meaningful code.

To ensure a 'closeness' to the data needed in the analysis of qualitative data, the interview transcripts were initially coded on paper (Gilbert, 2002<sup>50</sup>). QSR NVivo was used as a means of storing the coded text and retrieving specific coded texts as required.

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<sup>48</sup> Seale, C.F. (1999) Using Computers to Analyse Qualitative Data, In D. Silverman (Ed) *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage publications.

<sup>49</sup> Kelle, U. (1997) Theory building in Qualitative Research and Computer Programs for the Management of Textual Data. *Sociological Research Online* 2, 2. Available online: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/2/1.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert, L.S. (2002) 'Going the Distance: 'Closeness' in Qualitative Data Analysis Software', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 215-228.

### Appendix 3: Emergent codes from 2006/07 follow-up

Code	Code description	Number of interviews coded	Percentage of interviews (n=30)
1	over last year – completed training course/gained qualification	4	13
2	over last year – occupational change/new job	15	50
3	over last year – moved abroad/house	3	10
4	evaluative career decision making	6	20
5	strategic career decision making	7	23
6	aspirational career decision making	3	10
7	opportunistic career decision making	9	30
8	career management – researching jobs/courses and requirements	14	47
9	over the last year – on education/training course	18	60
10	over the last year – on benefits	2	7
11	client understanding of likes and dislikes	26	87
12	client self-reflection of situation/qualifications/skills	30	100
13	client has greater understanding of options (or lack of) available to them (such as LLM conditions)	18	60
14	client reflection on career management skills	13	43
15	client increased confidence in self and skills/knowledge	23	77
16	next year – active future plans	21	70
17	initial guidance still considered useful	23	77
18	constraints on progression – does not hold required qualification, low skilled, wrong skills, lack of experience, too highly qualified, working hours	11	37
19	client shows confidence in decisions	9	30
20	initial guidance – challenged ideas/understanding	6	23
21	initial guidance – gave direction, focus or plan for future	10	33
22	initial guidance – access to information and networks	13	43
23	guidance is considered useful/important	25	83
24	guidance should – needs to be more available	4	13
25	guidance should – access expertise and information (such as CV writing, local knowledge of employment and education opportunities, LMI)	16	53
26	guidance should – be able to talk to professional	6	20
27	guidance should – enable access to psychometric tests/CAG to support career guidance	4	13
29	career management – CV and/or application	11	37

	writing/interview		
30	client understanding about needs to be done to achieve future goal/wish	7	23
31	yes, client thinks they have career	7	23
32	no, client does not think they have career	7	23
33	client unsure whether they have career	2	7
34	client does not think they have a career at the moment	11	37
35	advice from personal networks (i.e. family, friends, work colleagues)	22	73
36	received further professional guidance	3	10
37	advice from other professional (i.e. course tutor, life coach)	17	57
38	dealing with set-backs – not problematic/easy	13	43
39	dealing with set-backs – difficult	7	23
40	next year – situation unlikely to change	5	17
41	next year – inactive career plans	8	27
42	future – education and training	6	20
43	future – career change/new job/progression	16	53
44	future – learn new skills	5	17
45	future problem – finance, language barriers, LLM, inappropriate experience/qualifications	4	13
46	over last year – employed part-time	9	30
47	constraint on progression – personal circumstances (such as health, finance, caring commitments, uncertainty)	21	70
48	career management – communication skills	7	23
49	client re-evaluation of priorities impacting on careers and decisions	5	17
50	initial guidance – gave client confidence	8	27
51	future need for guidance/help/advice	19	63
52	future – planning family	1	3
53	guidance should – agree to action/follow-up to help with decision making	15	50
54	over last year – employed full-time	16	53
55	examples of career resilience	9	30
56	over last year – gained new skills	13	43
57	guidance is not considered useful/helpful/important	1	3
58	future – range of activities/ideas discussed	10	33
59	over last year – unemployed	2	7
60	lacking in confidence/enthusiasm	11	37

61	further help/guidance failed	5	17
62	unsure of usefulness of initial guidance	2	7
63	future – unsure, no plans or ideas discussed	3	10
64	initial guidance – gave support, someone to talk to	3	10
65	over last year – self-employed	3	10
66	over last year – job placement	6	20
67	guidance should – challenge/generate ideas, encourage consideration of different options, focus, direction	9	30
68	guidance should – assess client situation (such as ability to drive, access public transport, skills)	5	17
69	no recollection of initial guidance	5	17
70	over last year – job progression/pay rise	3	10
72	unsure where to seek further help	6	20
73	help/advice from researcher	2	7
74	further guidance/help useful	5	17
75	over last year – voluntary work	5	17
76	client has new perspective/outlook	3	10
77	over last year – changes in personal life	5	17
78	uncertain of role of guidance and its usefulness	4	13

Please note: Caution should be exercised when comparing the number of interviews coded with the analysis in the text of the report as in some cases reference is made to aggregate codes.