ADULT CAREER PROGRESSION & ADVANCEMENT: A FIVE YEAR STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GUIDANCE

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Foreword

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

The main purpose of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance in England by tracking the career trajectories of research participants over a five year period to evaluate the role of guidance in the process of career development and progression. Fifty in-depth case studies were initially completed (December, 2003 to March, 2004). Analyses of these data are presented in the first report (Bimrose et al., 2004). 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 (Bimrose et al., 2005) related to the follow-up findings on their career progression, reflections on the guidance interview, future plans and next steps[1]. Three years into the study, thirty-six clients were successfully contacted, with an analysis of their progress presented in the third report (Bimrose et al., 2006). This report began to explore the decision making styles of clients that were beginning to emerge from the data, as well as clients' views about the impact of guidance on their career transitions. The fourth report was based on data collected from the 30 clients who were successfully contacted three years after the case study interview (four years into the study). It focused on the career decision making styles of the clients, together with an exploration of the barriers and influences on these career choices and decisions (Bimrose & Barnes, 2007).

This fifth, and final report from the study, presents an analysis of data collected from 29 of the original 50 participants, who were tracked four years after their case-study interview for the research.

[1] 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. The steady and constructive project management provided to the project from Jenny Wallis is particularly appreciated. Of course, our sincere thanks also go to the 29 clients who gave up their time to talk to us for the fifth consecutive year. Without their ongoing help, interest and co-operation, this study would not have been possible.

As in the previous years of this five year investigation, the fieldwork for this final year was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from centres of expertise in guidance. 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.
  Professor Jenny Bimrose – 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. Expertise was provided by:
  Denise Smith – Research Associate
  Irene Krechowiecka – Research Associate

- **DMHAssociates**
  Deirdre Hughes – University Reader in Guidance Studies and Director of DMH Associates, acted as an external moderator and contributed to this final report.

- **National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling** (NICEC) assisted with the field research. Expertise was provided by:
  Lesley Haughton – Fellow

Finally, thanks go to Mary Munro, the external evaluator for the project, who is an Associate Fellow of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling. She has continued to perform a crucial role as critical evaluator to the project, making wide ranging comments on all aspects of the data analysis 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 with participants four years after this guidance interview is referred to as the 'fourth follow-up' interview.

- This five year longitudinal research provides clear evidence of what comprises one-to-one guidance interventions that are regarded as 'useful' to clients. It also provides insights to the extent to which guidance can support and/or shape individual's career trajectories. Cumulative evidence from five years of research provides a compelling case for guidance services to support adults to make successful transitions in a turbulent labour market.
- The complexity of adult career trajectories has been captured by this longitudinal study. Career trajectories have shifted, reversed, remained static – sometimes transforming themselves beyond recognition, as clients have: progressed in their chosen occupation; changed jobs; moved from unemployment to employment; engaged in a process of up-skilling or re-skilling; and dealt with personal changes in their life. Data collected over a five year period illustrate how adults move between and within both job roles and occupational sectors. It also shows movements into and out of education, training and paid employment.
- The methodology used has been successful in capturing rich data which provide powerful insights to the issues under investigation. Limitations of the study, many typical of qualitative approaches to research investigation, have been detailed and discussed.
- The use of 'expert witnesses' in the first year of the study assisted with the validation of findings by permitting triangulation of data. This approach represented a rigorous method of moderating the perceptions of the clients and those of guidance practitioners.
- Over the five year period of study, the attrition rate for participants has been low. In the first year, 50 clients participated; in the second, this reduced by only five to 45; in the third year of study, 36 clients were still participating; by the fourth year, this number was 30; and in the final stage of investigation, data were captured from 29 clients. The highest attrition rates occurred in relation to the group who

received their case study interview in a Further Education context. The lowest rates were in relation to clients who received their case study interview in either Connexions services, IAG Partnerships or Jobcentre Plus.

- The gender ratio of clients in the final phase of investigation mirrored that in the first year. Ratios of participants from minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities were also both similar to the first year and reflective of their proportion in the overall population.
- Data show an increase in qualification levels over the period of the study, irrespective of the organisational contexts in which the initial case study interview took place, especially for female clients.
- Numbers registered as unemployed have decreased over the period of study and those entering full-time employment has increased. The proportion of those in part-time employment has slightly increased, with the number in education and/or training having decreased. However, numbers participating in training and/or education whilst in full-time employment has increased over the five year period.
- A four-fold typology of career decision making styles has emerged, strongly, from the data. The extent to which individuals espouse an evaluative, strategic, aspirational or opportunistic approach to making decisions about their career progression is crucial to understanding the particular types of support required from guidance practice. This is because different preferences for making decisions appear to relate to various dimensions of practice (like the extent to which action plans are seen as relevant). Clients who seek the support of careers guidance are not a homogeneous group, with many not necessarily suited to a 'matching' approach.
- A key finding from the first year of study relates to the high proportion of clients who found their guidance 'useful' (98%, n=49), immediately after their guidance interview. Four years on, 69% (n=20) of the 29 clients remaining in the study still believed that the guidance had been useful, with 21% (n=6) being less sure of its usefulness and 10% (n=3) having either limited, or no, recollection.
- The 'usefulness' of guidance has, over the five years of the study, been consistently described as: providing access to specialist information; providing insights, focus, and clarification; motivating; increasing self-confidence and self-awareness; and/ or structuring opportunities for reflection and discussion.
- Of the 12 clients proactively pursuing action to progress their careers during the final year of the study, only four were directly related to their original plans, agreed with the guidance practitioners.

- By the final year of the study, the proportion of clients feeling that they had a career had increased to half of the sample (50%, n=13); eight were working towards a career and three were unsure. Only two felt they did not have one (the remaining three were unemployed).
- A high proportion of the final sample (90%, n=26) had received advice and help with their career decisions from family, friends, colleagues and/or tutors, with only 38% (n=11) having received further guidance and/or professional help. A tentative link was identified between decision making styles and attitudes to guidance. The majority of participants indicated that they would seek guidance from a professional in the future (72%, n=21). Although sometimes informal influences may overshadow formal inputs, the 'unique selling point' of the formal intervention may be the reassurance of professional authority and impartiality conferred.
- The nature of this study has enabled data to be captured over an extended timeframe, highlighting the way in which client evaluations of guidance impact are prone to change over time.
- There is an urgent need for a common terminology of definitions, activities and concepts relevant to the evaluation of guidance that would permit comparative evaluations of interventions delivered and services provided within and between countries. With the lack of clarity and consensus that currently surrounds the study of impact, the evaluation of effective guidance is multi-faceted, complex and challenging.
- One key challenge for the broad community of guidance is to develop differing types of evidence that address the requirements of quality assurance mechanisms for services and satisfy the needs of different stakeholders. Important though inputs and processes are, in quality assurance terms, it is the outcome that is most critical from the point of view of the client/customer.
- Assessing and measuring the impact of careers work is not simply about measurement. It is more about effective communication and building a learning community that has a strong and confident multi-dimensional voice that responds well to the pressure from policy-makers and consumers to deliver more relevant and cost-effective interventions. This will require workforce development activities based on this particular theme and the use of ICT to build the evidence base. Some possible workforce development issues for the new Adult Advancement and Careers service are discussed in the recommendations for this report.

- Data collected for this research could be further interrogated to illuminate relationships and trends that were not the primary focus of this study (for example, the relationship between qualifications and guidance approach adopted by practitioners or the reasons for participant drop-out).
- The challenge for the future is to ensure that the knowledge and understanding that can be derived from this study is integrated into practice and policy so that services to clients are improved.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim and objectives

This is the fifth and final report from a longitudinal study of effective guidance that took place in England over the period 2003 to 2008. The overall aim of the five year research study was:

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

The particular purpose of the final phase of the investigation was to continue with an examination of the career trajectories of adult consumers of guidance services during the fourth consecutive year after their initial 'case study interview' (that is, five years in total since the guidance intervention that was the focus of the first year of this investigation). A special focus has been maintained throughout this study on the particular role of guidance in the career progression and advancement of these adults. Specifically, the aim of the fifth year of study was:

- To explore adult client transitions during the fourth year after their initial case study interview and how guidance supports successful navigation of wider influences, life changes and barriers to progression.

Objectives were to:

- track the career progress of clients and their future plans;
- determine what/who has influenced the progress made;
- investigate clients' views of their progress and the barriers encountered;
- understand the nature of gains made by clients in developing knowledge, skills and experiences since the previous follow-up; and
- determine what further support clients need to progress their careers.

This longitudinal research study began with a detailed investigation of 50 in-depth case studies across varied guidance contexts (2003-2004). Each of these case studies 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 four follow-up phases of the research, over the period 2004-2008, were to track the career progression of the clients, who were the original recipients of guidance in these case studies, and evaluate the role played by guidance.

1.2 Longitudinal, qualitative research into effective guidance

The study was designed to build on the recommendation that insights already gained from quantitative data, should be complemented with those that can only be gained from qualitative research – in particular, longitudinal studies (Hughes, Bosley, Bowes & Bysshe, 2002[2]). Accordingly, the study comprised a five year (2003-2008) case study approach which used qualitative methodologies that have had as the primary focus the 'user voice' – that is, the perspective of the clients and/or customers, who are the primary consumers of guidance services. One other distinctive feature of the research methodology is that practitioners determined what comprised 'guidance' for the study.

The professional contexts in which the original case studies were carried out included: further education; higher education; charitable/voluntary organisations; publicly funded adult guidance organisations; and the workplace. Fifty in-depth case studies were undertaken across these varied organisational contexts in the first year of investigation (2003-2004). These case studies compared: the client's perceptions of a guidance episode; the practitioner's perceptions of the same guidance episode; and the perceptions of an 'expert witness'[3]. They also explored the precise nature of guidance being delivered to consumers of services. There were four main data sources for each case study. These comprised: organisational sources (reports, mission statements, researcher observations, managers, practitioners, publicity leaflets, etc.); digital recordings (of 50 guidance interviews together with typed transcriptions); questionnaires completed by researchers (collecting brief background data on the client, the practitioner and the guidance context); and finally, questionnaires completed by individual clients, guidance practitioners and 'expert witnesses', which all probed the same features of the guidance interviews[4].

A team of eight researchers undertook data collection in the first year of investigation. All were experienced researchers with six experienced both in research and in guidance practice. Five, who were also experienced assessors of guidance interview, acted as 'expert witnesses'. Moderation of these expert witnesses was undertaken, on a random basis, by two senior researchers in the team (one of whom was external to the lead organisation). An evaluator external to the research team acted as a moderator for the

[2] Hughes, D., Bosley, S., Bowes, L., & Bysshe, S. (2002). *The Economic Benefits of Guidance*. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby. Retrieved 7 August 2008, from http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/the_economic_benefits2002.pdf.

[3] The 'expert witnesses' all had significant experience of delivering and/or assessing guidance.

[4] Expert witnesses did not observe the interviews 'live'. Rather, they listened to the digital recording of the interview and had access to a typed transcript.

overall research process. In the subsequent four years of data collection for the follow-up studies, the consistent involvement of five of the original eight researchers contributed to achieving a degree of uniformity and consistency in the methodology.

For each of the follow-up studies, the clients who participated in the initial phase of this study were contacted by telephone on an annual basis (2004-2008) starting approximately one year after the case study interview. Each of these telephone interviews was digitally recorded and then transcribed. The overall attrition rate of participants in the study has been extremely low, with 45 of the 50 clients successfully contacted for the first follow-up; 36 for the second; 30 the third; and 29 for the final follow-up (which includes a client lost in the third year follow-up, but successfully contacted in the final year). Methods used to contact the clients, the response rates and the characteristics of those clients successfully contacted have all been detailed elsewhere (Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes, & Orton, 2004[5]). A discussion of factors contributing to the low attrition rate for this study can also be found in a previous report from this study (Bimrose, Barnes, & Hughes, 2006[6]) and in section 2.7, below.

The four phases of follow-up interviews have focused on: tracking clients' progress and details of their career trajectories; their perception of the guidance received; and its role in their career development. In particular, follow-ups have investigated the barriers and influences and the client views of their career choices and decisions. Details of the research methodology and findings from each of the first four phases of this study can be found in: Bimrose et al., 2004[7]; Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2005[8]; and Bimrose et al., 2006[9]; and Bimrose & Barnes, 2007a[10]. Brief summaries of findings from these four reports follow.

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[5] Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., Hughes, D., & Orton, M. (2004). *What is Effective Guidance? Evidence from Longitudinal Case Studies in England.* Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research and Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/egr2004.pdf.

[6] Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., & Hughes, D. (2006). *Developing Career Trajectories In England: The Role of Effective Guidance*. Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research & Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/bydate/egreportnov06.pdf.

[7] Op cit.

[8] Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., & Hughes, D. (2005). *Effective Guidance One Year On: Evidence from Longitudinal Case Studies in England.* Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research and Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/2005/egreportoct05.pdf.

[9] Op cit.

[10] Bimrose, J., & Barnes, S.-A. (2007a). *Navigating the Labour Market: Career Decision Making and the Role of Guidance.* Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research and Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/2007/egreport08.pdf.

1.3 Key findings from initial phases of the study

Findings from the first year (2003 – 2004)

The first year of this research investigation was successful in capturing the distinctive features of guidance provision found useful by adults in a diverse range of service settings, with a varied sample of service consumers. In evaluating the efficacy of guidance, 'effectiveness' was defined primarily as what was found 'useful' to recipients of services, together with the practitioners delivering services and independent 'expert' witnesses. This triangulation of perceptions of effectiveness was built into the methodology to address issues of validity and reliability. Of the fifty clients who participated in this research, all but one stated that they had found the guidance they had received useful, immediately after the intervention. 'Useful' guidance was identified as: supporting positive outcomes for the client; providing access to expert knowledge, information and networks; promoting constructive change in the client; and, overall, providing the client with a positive experience.

All three of these stakeholder groups (clients, practitioners and expert witnesses) were found to have very similar understandings of the nature of 'useful' guidance. Specifically, a high level of agreement was found about: the nature of useful guidance; the welcome and introduction by the practitioner; whether the client felt comfortable discussing personal information; agreeing a future action plan; and the extent to which they felt respected. The highest levels of disagreement related to: the extent to which the client had understood, clearly, what was going to happen in the guidance interview; whether the client's thinking had been changed; and whether clients had understood the importance of issues highlighted in the guidance intervention. Good practice in guidance was identified by participants as: allowing for reflection; discussion; and affecting some measure of transformation in the client, with one of the key features of guidance identified relating to the expertise of the practitioners delivering the service.

Guidance services for adults were found to be delivered across a wide range of differing contexts, supported from multiple funding streams. This created opportunities to engage with creative and innovative service provision, but also brought pressures of uncertainty and discontinuity regarding future funding. Quality standards were evident across all organisational contexts studied and standards of specialist, and relevant, qualifications amongst practitioners were consistently high.

A key finding from the first year of investigation related to the model of guidance in action that emerged from the analysis of 50 interview transcripts. This model consisted

of four main categories and forty sub-sets of practitioner activities in the guidance interview, which typified the characteristics of useful guidance. The four broad categories are: building a working alliance; exploring potential; identifying options and strategies; and ending, follow-through. From the analysis, it was clear that a 'matching' approach dominated. A mix of standard techniques and non-standard techniques were evident in practice.

Findings from the second year (2004 – 2005)

The attrition rate was extremely low in the first year of follow-ups, with 45 of the original 50 participants (90%) successfully followed up one year after their case study interview. Further evidence of the positive impacts of guidance was found. For example, 78% (n=35) felt that guidance had resulted in direct and positive change in their lives (such as: a change in their situation, or thinking, and/or future plans). The majority (87%, n=39) of clients still regarded their guidance as 'useful' one year after the event, whilst 11% (n=5) were less sure of its value. One still felt that their guidance had been of no value. Those reporting positive experiences of guidance identified five particular reasons for its usefulness. Specifically, these were when it: gave access to specialist information; reduced confusion; motivated or provided new insights; confirmed ideas and built confidence. The majority of clients (89%, n=40) had followed through on all, or elements of, the action agreed in their case study interviews (this includes clients who were continuing to implement action at the time of the follow-up interview). However, even where agreed action had not been implemented or advice followed, participants reported how guidance had acted as a catalyst for positive change. Over half of the clients (53%, n=24) were found to be enhancing their occupational competence by engaging with education or training (that is, re-skilling or up-skilling).

Four serious barriers to career progression were identified. These were impeding individual progress by preventing clients from implementing the action plans agreed during the case study interview. All were external to the guidance intervention and comprised: financial constraints; childcare commitments; health issues; and local labour market conditions. Additionally, many clients who either received guidance whilst undertaking higher education or, after having recently completed their degrees, were engaged with prolonged transitions into the labour market and were using various strategies to progress (that is, testing out options, buying time or clarifying values). It was also found that 27 (60%) of the 45 clients contacted had received further guidance since their case study interview.

A key finding from the first phase of follow related to how the measurement of the impact of guidance needs to take account of 'distance travelled' by clients, in a way that focuses on the process of effective guidance, as well as its quantifiable outcomes**.** This raised issues relating to the 'soft' outcomes from career guidance interventions.

Findings from the third year (2005 – 2006)

In the second phase of follow-up (i.e. the third year of the investigation), the attrition rate for research participants continued to be low, with 36 (80%) of the 45 clients who were interviewed for the one year follow-up now also interviewed for the two year follow-up. This represented a 72% follow-up rate of the original sample of 50 participants. Of those followed up in this phase of the investigation, 72% (n=26) of the 36 clients still regarded their guidance interview as useful. However, 14% (n=5) of participants were unsure of its usefulness, whilst 14% (n=5) could no longer recollect the guidance they had received. Significantly, the client who was negative about their case study interview, both immediately after the event and one year on, now recognised (two years on) that some aspects had proved to be of some value.

Data indicated how the qualification level of clients has risen over the last two years. Thirty-three per cent of clients (n=12) had increased their highest qualification level by 1 level or more, with the majority increasing by 1 or 2 levels (75%, n=9). About one third of clients regarded the need to invest in their human capital development as essential for the pursuit of longer term career goals.

From this second follow up phase, four distinct career decision making styles started to emerge from the data: evaluative, strategic, opportunistic and aspirational[11]. Additionally, some participants were able to identify career management competencies that had assisted their career development[12]. Interestingly, many clients attributed the acquisition of these competencies to their guidance practitioners.

Findings from the fourth year (2006 – 2007)

In this fourth year of data collection (i.e. the third year of follow-up study), there was again a low attrition rate with an overall follow-up rate of 60% from the original sample of

[11] The methodology used for the process of identification of these styles is detailed in the report from this phase of the research, involving a standard procedure of coding statements independently, then having these codes validated by an external third party.

[12] Specifically, these were: improved ability to search for and research employment, education and training opportunities; the ability to be proactive in their approach to transition; being able to demonstrate their confidence in their abilities and decisions; and their awareness of the need to develop new, transferable skills.

50. That is, 30 (83%) of the 36 clients who were interviewed for the two year follow-up were also interviewed for the third year of follow-up. There was strong evidence to suggest that clients still valued their guidance interviews some time after the event. Four years after their guidance interview, the majority of clients still regarded guidance as useful (77%, n=23). However, seven per cent (n=2) were less sure of its usefulness, whilst 17% (n=5) could no longer remember the guidance they had received. These adult clients were, unsurprisingly, also found to be taking advantage of personal 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. So help with career progression was coming from varied sources outside of formal guidance interventions.

The proportion of clients who had entered full-time employment over the period since the case study interview had increased from 22% (that is, 11 of the client participants in 2003/04), to 53% (that is, 16 of the client participants in 2006/07). It should be noted that several clients (30%, n=9) had experienced significant changes in their personal life, which had prompted a re-evaluation of priorities, career goals and employment. Whilst no casual relationship can be claimed from these findings, this was found to be a distinctive trend.

The fourfold typology of career decision making, which had started to emerge during the second phase of investigation, was found to have been stable over a two year period (i.e. strategic; evaluative; aspirational; and opportunistic). There was also clear evidence of career resilience[13] in nine cases (30%). However, barriers to career progression were still evident for a small number of participants – in particular, persistent ill-health and out-dated skill sets were representing insurmountable problems for a small number of individuals.

Helping individuals to overcome these types of barriers to career progression represents a major policy challenge. Even for clients not grappling with these particular types of challenges, there is evidence from this longitudinal research study that guidance can operate powerfully as an effective mechanism for facilitating and supporting the process of re-skilling and up-skilling the labour force. In so doing, it can also make a positive contribution to personal development and fulfilment. Pollard et al. (2007)[14] highlight that

[13] This refers to the ability of individuals to take control, proactively, of their career progression, by managing challenging and difficult circumstances.

[14] Pollard, E., Tyers, C., Tuohy, S., & Cowling, M. (2007). *Assessing the Net Added Value of Adult Advice and Guidance* (No. RR825A, Research Report). Nottingham: Department for

in-depth support in the form of advice and guidance is *not* associated with any observable labour market outcomes, but that it *is positively* associated with attitudinal work-related-outcomes, including increased work satisfaction and increases in confidence over time.

The next section reviews, briefly, the current policy context for adult guidance in England, together with the potential role for guidance in the government's skills strategy.

1.4 Skills development and guidance: the policy context

The White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005[15]) complements and extends the earlier Skills White Paper: '21st Century Skills: Realising our potential' (DfES, Dti, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003[16]). In combination, these papers contain the government's strategy for raising the skill level of the labour force in the UK and 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 to make more effective choices.

An influential governmental review, led by Lord Sandy Leitch, subsequently endorsed the importance of embedding a culture of learning and proposed that 'a new and sustained national campaign to raise career aspirations and awareness' would contribute to the achievement of the skills agenda (HM Treasury, 2006, p.103), together with support to make informed choices (p.107). The ultimate objectives of this review were to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice by setting an appropriate policy framework. Findings from the Leitch Review confirm those of the Skills White Papers (DfES, DTI, HM Treasury and DWP, 2003[17]; Department for Education and Skills, 2005[18]), emphasising the need for the UK to 'raise its game' by

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Education and Skills. Retrieved 16 December 2008, from http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/rr825a.pdf.

[15] Department for Education and Skills. (2005). Skills: Getting On in Business; Getting On at Work. London: The Stationery Office. Retrieved 4 June 2005, from http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/.

[16] Department for Education and Skills, Department for Trade and Industry, HM Treasury, & Department for Work and Pensions. (2003). 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential [Individuals, Employers, Nation]. London: The Stationery Office. Retrieved 30 May 2007, from http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/21st%20Century%20Skills.pdf.

[17] Op cit.

[18] Op cit.

increasing the skill levels of its labour force, if it is to increase its economic competitiveness (HM Treasury, 2006, p.1[19]). Of particular relevance to this longitudinal research into the efficacy of guidance is the recommendation in this review that there should be:

> *…a new universal adult careers service, providing labour market focused careers advice for all adults.* (p.23)

This new service would 'give every adult easy access to skills and careers advice that will help them find work and progress in their careers' (p.7) and would '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). The importance of effective information, advice and guidance (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 & DIUS, 2007[20]) takes up the challenge of implementing the skills agenda, acknowledging that there is 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). Three major themes have recently emerged[21], which include advancement, personalised services and careers services neatly interlocking and each acting as potentially powerful levers to inform and shape the ultimate design of the single, universal advancement and careers service. The concept of 'advancement' can be traced back to a lecture to the Fabian Society (2004)[22] when John Denham stated

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[19] HM Treasury. (2006). *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for All in the Global Economy - World Class Skills (Final Report)*. Norwich: HMSO. Retrieved 18 January 2008, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/6/4/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf.

[20] HM Government & Department for Innovation Universities and Skills. (2007). *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England.* London: HMSO. Retrieved 18 January 2008, from http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/worldclassskills.pdf.

[21] Hughes, D. (2008). *New Adult Advancement and Careers Service in England: What's in a name?* Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance. Retrieved 16 December 2008, from http://www.icg-uk.org/c2/uploads/dmh%20advancement%20paper1%20november%202009.pdf.

[22] Denham, J. (2004). *Making Work Work: Creating Chances across the Labour Market.* Lecture delivered to the Fabian Society, 17 May 2004. London: Fabian Society. Retrieved 6 November 2008, from http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/MakingWorkWork.pdf.

that 'what people need are services able to support and guide them through the complex choices they have to make. Its selling point might be that it's the number to call if you want – in an old fashioned phrase – to better yourself'. Alongside this, personalisation[23] challenges government and public sector agencies to create the conditions for individuals to become more active/pro-active citizens; referred to as 'bottom up, mass social innovation enabled by the state' (p.16). Given the current economic downturn, the new national 'careers' service could arguably make a significant contribution to the social, economic, moral, health and well being of the nation (that is, somewhere and someone to turn to for advice and guidance when needed).

In the context of these current policy developments and the undertaking by the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills to launch a new adult careers service, findings form this research study are particularly relevant and timely. Lessons that can be learned from the research include: the precise nature of guidance delivered by practitioners; what clients find useful; the role of guidance in the career progression and advancement of clients over a five year period; the ways in which clients engage with career decision making; and what clients expect and want from guidance services.

1.5 Report structure

In addition to this first section, the report contains a further six sections. 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. It also considers the limitations of this qualitative, case study investigation into effective guidance. Section three re-visits, for the third time, the typology of career decision making styles, which emerged in the third phase of data analysis and has now been further tested in relation to the fourth and fifth phases of analysis. The fourth section explores what, precisely, clients have found useful from their guidance, over a five year period and, importantly, the impact it has made on career progression. Section five focuses on the role of action plans, which are distinguished from 'active' plans in career progression, as well as barriers to progression, perceptions of 'career' and likely future demand for guidance services. Section 6 re-visits the question: 'What is effective guidance? It reviews challenges inherent in the assessment and measurement of impact and considers issues relevant to building a robust evidence base for adult guidance services in England, arguing for an evaluation culture to be developed amongst organisations delivering services. The seventh section presents the conclusions from the fourth, and

[23] Leadbeater, C. (2004). *Personalisation through participation*. London: Demos.

final, year of investigation in this longitudinal study. The eighth and final section presents recommendations from the study.

2. Methodology: follow-up of clients

Twenty-nine clients were contacted successfully by telephone for the fourth follow-up (four years after the case study interview). This included 28 of the 30 clients who were interviewed for the third follow-up (three years after the case study interview) plus one client who had been travelling at the time of the last follow-up interviews. Two, therefore, dropped out of the study between 2006/07 and 2007/08 and one returned after an absence from the study of one year. A low attrition rate has, therefore, yet again been achieved. This may be due, at least in part, to constructive relationships that have been established by the researchers with the study participants over the five year period of the investigation. In this final year of data collection, it has been particularly evident that the clients valued researchers remembering their individual stories – essential in establishing trust, building rapport and encouraging the clients to talk freely and openly.

As in the previous four years of follow-up, the research team for the 2007/08 follow-ups remained unchanged. So the researchers who undertook the final year of follow-ups had met clients in the first year of the study and had contacted these same clients for four consecutive years, ensuring a sense of continuity for clients. All of the research team have expertise in conducting in-depth qualitative interviews. Three of the team are also experienced guidance practitioners.

This section focuses on the 29 clients tracked throughout this study, outlining the methods of contact and the response rates. Since the guidance received in their case study interview five years previously, clients' situations and circumstances have changed as a result of the impact of both external and internal factors. Career trajectories have shifted, reversed, remained static – sometimes transforming themselves beyond recognition, as clients have: progressed in their chosen occupation; changed jobs; moved from unemployment to employment; engaged in a process of up-skilling or re-skilling; and dealt with personal changes in their life. This section reports on these changes, together with their highest qualification achieved over the last five years.

The approach adopted for the analysis of the transcripts is also briefly discussed. Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of data, since the sample size is small. The data has, however, been collected from the same participants over a period of five years, so provides powerful insights to the issues under investigation. As with all

previous reports completed for this investigation, in discussing results, the convention has been followed of presenting numbers, followed by their percentage in relation to the sample size.

2.1 Interview proforma

For the fourth and final year of follow-ups, clients were again interviewed by telephone. To guide these telephone interviews, an interview proforma was developed and agreed by the research team (see Appendix 1). Evidence from the previous follow-up interviews and a review of the study's objectives were used to construct the interview proforma for this final phase of the study.

The overall aim of the final follow-up was to explore client transitions during the fourth year after their case study interview and how this related to influences and barriers, life changes, career decision making and career management skills. The proforma comprised questions based on the following broad areas:

- current situation and changes;
- career development and changes over the last 12 months and five years;
- reflections on initial guidance interview (case study) and further guidance;
- further help and support in achieving career goals in the future;
- client self-reflections on progress and experiences over the last five years;
- decision making, influences and constraints (in terms of career management skills, career resilience and career adaptability); and
- future plans for the next few years.

This final follow-up interview not only focused on tracking the career development and progress of clients since the last interview, but also sought to understand the nature of any gains made in developing their knowledge, skills, qualifications and experiences over the last five years.

2.2 Response rates

All clients contacted had previously given their consent to be contacted. Permission was secured again from the client who had not participated in the previous years' follow-up, as she had been on a career break and travelling. This client was happy to continue with their participation in the study.

Only two clients who were contacted during the third follow-up study could not be contacted for the fourth. The contact details for one were no longer valid and despite using various strategies that had previously proved successful, this client could not be contacted. The other client was contacted and an interview was arranged on several occasions. However, it gradually became apparent that they no longer wished to participate in the study. To contact study participants, the same variety of methods used in previous years of the study were again employed[24].

Contact with clients was made using their preferred method (identified at the previous follow-up interview). In several instances, email was the preferred method of contact, with researchers being able to arrange interviews at times convenient for the client. In 12 cases, the follow-up interview took place immediately and in 17 cases the researcher agreed to call back at a time that was more convenient for the client. All of clients were happy to respond to the questions, share their career narratives, current and future plans, as well as their experiences of advancing their careers.

The length of the telephone interviews ranged from 15 to 81 minutes, with the average length just over 36 minutes. These interviews were longer than in previous years and there was much interest in the overall findings of the study. All clients participating said they wished to receive information on the study and all indicated their willingness to participate in future research.

Twenty-nine of the 50 clients who originally participated in the in-depth case studies were successfully contacted four years on, achieving an overall response rate of 58% (see Table 1, below). Clients have been lost across all five professional guidance contexts, in which the in-depth case studies were carried out[25]. A good response was achieved from clients who had their case study interview with Connexions, an IAG partnership or Jobcentre Plus and in a Higher Education throughout the study. The highest attrition rate occurred for those case studies recorded in the further education context (see Table 1).

[24] Methods used were emails, letters, telephone calls and messages.
[25] 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.

Table 1 Response rates by context for the follow-ups

Case study context		Number of clients successfully contacted after their case study interview			
		1 year on	2 years on	3 years on	4 years on
Connexions, IAGP & Jobcentre Plus (n=14)	Total	12	10	9	9
	(%)	86	71	64	64
Higher education (n=10)	Total	9	9	8	7
	(%)	90	90	80	70
Further education (n=10)	Total	9	4	3	2
	(%)	90	40	30	20
Community/outreach guidance & not for profit organisations (n=8)	Total	7	5	4	4
	(%)	88	63	50	50
Private organisations & workplace guidance (n=8)	Total	8	8	6	7
	(%)	100	100	75	88
Total number of clients contacted		**45**	**36**	**30**	**29**
Overall response rate		**90%**	**72%**	**60%**	**58%**

2.3 Characteristics of clients successfully contacted four years on

The initial client population participating in the study comprised 66% female (n=33) and 34% male (n=17). In the final phase of the study, 29 clients were successfully contacted, 62% are female (n=18) and 38% are male (n=11). The gender ratio of clients in the final sample was, therefore, similar to that in the initial phase of investigation with more females lost to study than males, overall. Characteristics of clients successfully contacted for the fourth 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 four years on*

Client characteristics (n=29)	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=9	Male	Female	Total n=7	Male	Female	Total n=2	Male	Female	Total n=4	Male	Female	Total n=7	
Age (1)																
18-29	2	3	**5**	2	5	**7**	1	1	**2**	1		**1**		2	**2**	17
30-39										1		**1**	1	2	**3**	4
40-49	1	2	**3**								1	**1**	1	1	**2**	6
50-59		1	**1**							1		**1**				2
60+																
Total	**3**	**6**	**9**	**2**	**5**	**7**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**5**	**7**	**29**
Ethnic Origin																
White (2)	2	4	**6**	2	5	**7**	1	1	**2**	1	1	**2**	2	3	**5**	22
British	1	1	**2**							1		**1**				3
English		1	**1**							1		**1**				2
Black British														1	**1**	1
* 'Half caste' (Nigerian/White)														1	**1**	1
Total	**3**	**6**	**9**	**2**	**5**	**7**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**5**	**7**	**29**
Disability																
yes		1	**1**		1	**1**				1	1	**2**	1		**1**	5
no	3	5	**8**	2	3	**5**	1	1	**2**	1		**1**	1	5	**6**	22
unknown					1	**1**				1		**1**				2
Total	**3**	**6**	**9**	**2**	**5**	**7**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**5**	**7**	**29**

* The data presented in this table were collected during the initial phase of the study and only includes those clients who were successfully contacted fours years on from the case study interview. Disability and ethnic origin were self-reported by the clients.
(1) Denotes age at the time of the initial case study interview five years ago.
(2) This category includes those clients who defined themselves variously as: White; White UK; White English; White British; and White European.

The final sample comprised 59% (n=17) clients who were aged between 18 and 29 years at the time of the case study interview in 2003/2004. Across all contexts: 14% of clients were aged 30-39 years (n=4); 21% were 40-49 years (n=6); and 7% were aged 50-59 years (n=2). The ethnic origin (self-reported by the client) of the client population was predominately 'White', or as 'White' (but with a nationality also self-reported) that is, 76% (n=22). Five clients (17%) defined themselves as 'British' or 'English'. In the final phase of the study, two (7%) (both female) self-defined as being from an ethnic minority group (including 'Black British' and 'Half Caste') were successfully contacted. This compares with five in the original sample. Five (17%) of the initial seven clients self-reporting a disability were successfully contacted four years on.

2.4 Participation in education and training

The highest level of qualification achieved by the 29 clients who participated throughout the study was recorded at the start of the study; two years on; and four years on (see Table 3, below). In addition, a record had been made of further education and training courses undertaken. It should be noted that the highest qualifications achieved have been mapped onto the new qualification framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland[26], which comprises eight levels.

At the beginning of the study, 45% of clients (n=13) had a Level 4 qualification, or below. Two years on, this had decreased to 34% (n=10) and four years on had decreased yet again to 31% (n=9). As the numbers with qualifications at Level 4 decreased, so the numbers at Level 5 increased, as those clients with Level 4 qualifications who had embarked on higher level qualifications completed course successfully over the period of the study. Fifty-five per cent (n=16) had a Level 5 or above qualification at the beginning of the study. Two years on, this was 66% (n=19) and four years on it had changed to 69% (n=20) of clients[27]. Two clients, who held no qualifications at the start of the study, have gained a Level 3 and a Level 5 qualification during the past 5 years. These data are shown in Table 3, below.

Table 3, below, shows the highest qualification level attained by clients at the beginning of the study (2003/04), 2 years on (2005/06), and their qualification level 4 years on (at the end of the study).

[26] See http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/glacier/qual/compare/ .
[27] This trend can be accounted for, in part, by 10 of the 50 of the original participants being students in higher education – the increased proportion of people qualified to level 4 reflects their having successfully completed degree courses.

Table 3 Highest qualification level of clients, 2003/04 - 2007/08

Organisational context of guidance interview		Qualification Level								
		No quals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Connexions, IAGP & Jobcentre Plus	initial			3	1	2	2		1	
	2 years on			3	1	2	2		1	
	4 years on			2	2	2	2		1	
Higher Education	initial				3	1	1	2		
	2 years on				1		2	4		
	4 years on				1		2	3	1	
Further Education	initial	1			1					
	2 years on				1		1			
	4 years on					1	1			
Community/outreach guidance & not-for-profit organisations	initial	1	1		1		1			
	2 years on			2	1		1			
	4 years on			1	2		1			
Private organisations & workplace guidance	initial			1		3	3			
	2 years on			1		2	4			
	4 years on			1		2	4			
Total	**initial**	**2**	**1**	**4**	**6**	**6**	**7**	**2**	**1**	
	2 years on			**6**	**4**	**4**	**10**	**4**	**1**	
	4 years on			**4**	**5**	**5**	**10**	**3**	**2**	

Fifty-eight per cent of clients (n=17) in the final cohort had not gained any higher qualifications over the period of the study (see Table 4, below). Of the 42% (n-12) of clients who achieved further qualifications over the study period, ten were women and only two were men. Five (17%) achieved further qualifications that were at a lower level than those already held. For instance, one graduate has continually participated in lower level vocational training courses and now holds a significant number of work – based qualifications, which have proved useful in employment.

Table 4, below, shows the changes in the qualification levels of clients from the initial case study interview to the final follow-up interview.

Table 4 Increase in qualification level of clients, 2003/04 - 2007/08

Case study context	Gender	Change in highest qualification level attained					
		No change	same level plus further qualification(s)	increase of 1 level	increase of 2 levels	increase of 3 levels	increase of 4 or more levels
Connexions, IAGP & Jobcentre Plus (n=9)	Male	3					
	Female	5	1				
Higher education (n=7)	Male	2					
	Female	1	1		1	2	
Further education (n=2)	Male						1
	Female			1			
Community/outreach guidance & not for profit organisations (n=4)	Male	2				1	
	Female			1			
Private organisations & workplace guidance (n=7)	Male	1		1			
	Female	3	2				
Total (n=29)	**Male**	**8**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1**
	Female	**9**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**0**

Note: Qualification levels are mapped on to the England, Wales and Northern Ireland Qualifications Framework (see http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/glacier/qual/compare/). In those instances where a client's grades at GCSE were not recorded, Level 2 was assigned.

Overall, these data show an increase in qualification levels of clients over the period of the study, irrespective of the organisational contexts in which the initial case study interview took place. The completion of degree courses by participants from higher education accounts for a large proportion of this increase. However, there is one example where a client sought guidance because she was considering withdrawing from her degree course. As a direct result of her guidance, she changed her degree course and successfully completed her higher education.

2.5 Changes in employment status

Like changes in qualification levels, changes in clients' employment status have been tracked and recorded each year. Over the five year period, the number of clients registered as unemployed has decreased, from 34% to 3% (see Table 5). This does not include one client who has suffered persistent poor health and was, therefore, not available for work. The proportion of clients who have entered full-time employment since the beginning of the study has increased from 31% (n=9) to 45% (n=13). This proportion was higher in 2005/06 (62%, n=18), because clients entered education and training courses. In one case, a client changed their working hours. The proportion of those in part-time employment has also increased over the period of the study from 10% (n=3) to 31% (n=9). The number of clients in full-time education and/or training has decreased over the period of study (mainly a reflection of clients leaving higher education and moving into employment). The number of clients participating in training and/or education whilst in full-time employment has increased over the five year period.

Table 5, below, tracks changes in employment status over the last five years, including: participation in training and/or education courses; involvement in voluntary work; changes in working hours; occupational change and progression; and pay rises. It should be noted that this table only provides data for those 29 clients tracked over the entire five year period of the study.

Table 5 Change in client employment status, 2003/04 - 2007/08

Employment status	All clients				
	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Unemployed	**8**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**
undertaking voluntary work					
undertaking voluntary work and in training			1		
career break				1	1
Unemployed with caring responsibilities	**2**	**1**	**1**		
In training/education	**6**	**6**	**4**	**4**	**4**
higher level of training/education		1	1		
in part-time employment			1		
changed course		1			
In training/education with caring responsibilities	**1**	**2**	**2**	**1**	
higher level of training/education			1		
undertaking voluntary work				1	
Part-time employed	**3**	**4**	**3**	**6**	**9**
with caring responsibilities	1			3	1
with caring responsibilities and in training/education		1	1		2
in training/education		1		1	2
occupational change		1	2	1	1
promotion and/or pay rise					1
occupational change and in training/education					
undertaking voluntary work					2
Full-time employed*	**9**	**13**	**18**	**15**	**13**
with caring responsibilities			1	1	1
promotion and/or pay rise		4	2		5
occupational change		1	1	6	
occupational change and in training					
occupational change and caring responsibilities		1			
in training/education		2	3	2	4
undertaking voluntary work	1				1
Other (ill health)		**1**		**2**	**2**
with caring responsibilities				1	2
in part-time employment					1
in training/education				1	
Total	**29**	**29**	**29**	**29**	**29**

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:

- participated in, or completed, an education or training course (52%, n=15);
- participated in on-the-job training (not leading to a qualification) (31%, n=9);
- been engaged in personal development activities (such as participated in recreational courses, joined local community groups etc.) (17%, n=5);
- undertaken some work experience or participated in a work placement as part of their training (14%, n=4);

- applied for jobs (24%, n=7);
- started a new job or gained employment after a period of unemployment (28%, n=8);
- volunteered (17%, n=5);
- experienced changes in their job role (such as a change in responsibilities or an expansion in their role) (28%, n=8);
- received a promotion and/or pay rise (17%, n=5);
- experienced a change in their personal circumstances, which has influenced their career (such as starting a family, children growing up, new elder care responsibilities etc.) (24%, n=7);
- changed location (such as moved house or found work abroad) (28%, n=8); and/or
- taken a career break (10%, n=3).

2.6 Approach to the analysis

Telephone interviews were undertaken with 29 of the initial 50 clients who agreed to participate in this study, guided by the use an agreed interview proforma (see Appendix 1). With well established relationships between the researchers and the clients, discussions were open and frank. The majority of clients responded openly, were happy to discuss their careers, decisions and reflect on their experiences, future plans and progress.

As in previous years, the interviews were transcribed and analysed using QSR NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software package[28]). During the analysis (listed in Appendix 2), codes were used inductively to categorise the transcripts. Transcript coding was moderated by two further researchers to check for accuracy and the understanding of emerging themes. Drawing together coded text from previous years, further analysis was undertaken to examine career decision making styles, career management skills and resilience, together with reflections on careers guidance and what makes it effective.

Alongside this analysis, the stories of clients were scrutinised, through use of client vignettes written each year by the researchers. These narratives provided further

[28] For further information on this package see Appendix 13 of the first report (Bimrose et al., 2004).

evidence of how adults advance their careers and the contexts in which they make career decisions.

2.7 Limitations of the study

A review of the economic benefits of guidance (Hughes et al., 2002[29]) noted that much evidence of the impact of guidance already existed, though much originated from the US and most had been produced by quantitative research methodologies. This review recommended a research programme that took account of existing studies and covered a three to five year period (p.21).

The qualitative, longitudinal case study approach over a five year period used for this investigation built on this recommendation. It was selected because it encouraged multiple methods of investigation and recognised the importance of both context and social structure. In so doing, it was able to combine elements of the psychological and social scientific approaches to assessing effective guidance. A full discussion of the methodology and its theoretical underpinnings can be found in the first report from this study[30] .

Whilst the qualitative methodologies used for this study have been successful in providing deep and rich insights into issues under investigation, like all approaches to research, they have limitations. Some will be discussed, briefly below.

Validity

All reasonable efforts were made in this study to ensure the reliability and credibility of data. It has been argued that the concepts of validity and reliability that have been developed for use in quantitative research can not be applied in the same way in qualitative studies[31]. The approach to sampling did achieve representation in terms of gender, age, disability, ethnic origin and geographical region. In addition, organisations from a variety of professional guidance contexts were included. Whilst the ideal of ten case studies drawn equally from each of five contrasting categories of contexts did not prove possible, each was represented[32]. In addition, triangulation of data sources was built into the research design by inclusion of an 'expert witness', to

[29] Op cit.
[30] Bimrose et al., (2004) Op cit.
[31] McLeod, J. (1999). *Practitioner Research in Counselling*. London: Sage.
[32] These five categories of context comprised: higher education; further education; private sector; voluntary and charitable organisations; and publically funded adult services.

validate the accounts of the guidance intervention given by clients in the first year of study. The first report discusses the extent of the agreement, and disagreement, amongst the clients the practitioners and these expert witnesses[33]. Additionally, from an original sample of 50 cases, with attrition occurring over a five year period, claims to generalisability could not be, nor have ever been, made.

Sample bias:

A sampling strategy was adopted that ensured a variety of organisational contexts delivering guidance and a range of geographical regions across the country[34] Subsequently, selection of participants was strictly guided by the principle of informed consent. This included the initial approach to potential guidance organisations, as well as for individual participants at each stage of the investigation. So, the purpose of the research and its methodology were explained to managers who were the gatekeepers of services, as well as guidance practitioners and clients - all were reminded of their right not to participate, or withdraw. Consequently, the sample was largely self-selecting. It is accepted that this procedure may have introduced an element of bias into the investigation – though given the nature of the inquiry, it is one that could not have been avoided.

Attrition rate of participants

With a low attrition rate (42%, n=21), the question arises of why 29 clients continued their participation in the research over a five year period. In qualitative research, maintaining the boundary between research and intervention can be challenging. Fostering a relationship between the researcher and their subjects is regarded as essential for gaining access to the subjective experience of participants[35]. One proposed solution is to incorporate an 'ethic of care' in research practice, such that there is an acknowledgement that the research process can, itself, be of benefit to research participants[36] and a caring relationship between the researcher and the

[33] Bimrose, et al. (2004) Op cit.

[34] Different geographical regions included: the West Country, East Anglia, Greater London, the Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire.

[35] Richardson, M. S. (2005). Implications of the Paradigms of Constructivism and Social Constructionism: A Challenge to Traditional Boundaries between Research and Intervention. Paper presented at the C*onstructivism and Vocational Psychology at the Society for Vocational Psychology's 7th Biennial Conference*, Vancouver, British Columbia (2-4 June 2005).

[36] Haverkamp, B. E. (2005). Ethical Perspectives on Qualitative Research in Applied Psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* Special Issue: Knowledge in Context: Qualitative Methods in Counseling Psychology Research, 52(2), 146-155.

research participant is given priority[37]. Indeed, one criterion for judging the validity of the findings from qualitative research has been identified as catalytic validity, which refers to the degree to which the research process re-orientates, focuses and energies the participants. Implicit is the idea that research should empower those who take part in it[38].

Researchers followed-up and interviewed the same clients over the five year period of the study both to ensure consistency and build upon relationships already established. Interview transcripts illustrate how researchers had established good working relationships with clients, in the majority of cases. Where appropriate, researchers were encouraged to give helpful responses to participants, for example, informing clients of different organisations offering guidance and encouraging clients to return to the original source of guidance. The same ethic of care was exercises for all research participants. This may, of course, have affected the willingness of participants to remain in the study and their career development.

Withdrawal of participation

It is difficult to establish reasons for drop out from the study. At each of the annual follow-ups, participants were asked if they were willing to continue with their participation. It was rare for clients to give reasons, in advance, for withdrawal. Where there were given, they tended to relate to individual perceptions of their situation. For example, one female participant withdrew after three years because she felt her career had been placed 'on hold' after the birth of her second child, so had nothing relevant to report about her career. Most commonly, the reason for loss of participants was that the contact details proved to be no longer correct. Clients had moved and not notified their new details, or (in some cases) gone abroad and were not easily contactable.

It is always possible that some clients withdrew because they felt negative about their guidance intervention. There may have been many reasons for this, related to the quality or availability of provision, or the key messages given by the practitioner during the interview. For example, a positive outcome from a guidance intervention might be facilitating a client's acceptance that aspirations are unrealistic. This could be (and often is) regarded negatively by the client themselves. An initial analysis of the characteristics of participants who withdrew revealed no distinctive patterns –

[37] Richardson (2005) Op cit.
[38] McLeod (1999) Op cit.

except that a larger number of those who had received their guidance in a Further Education context withdrew than any other context.

The nature of guidance interventions

Guidance interventions vary extensively in terms of their: intensity and duration; the nature of the specific needs of clients; the experience and training of the practitioner; resources available (time and materials) and the discreteness of provision (for instance, experienced as a specific activity or part of an integrated, on-going learning programme). In this sense, it is arguable that any research into guidance interventions is unlikely to be comparing like with like. There is also the definitional problem of what counts as guidance[39] .

In this research, the intervention that became the focus of the case study in the first year of the investigation and subsequently in the four years of follow-up was defined as guidance by the practitioners. Because of this, practitioners selected a guidance intervention that was sometimes an initial guidance interview and sometimes a follow-up. In the in-depth analysis of the guidance interview, no distinguishing characteristics of these two types of interventions were detected in terms of the strategies and techniques that were used by practitioners. Nor were clients more likely to evaluate initial guidance as more effective than guidance that was a follow-up intervention. It is possible, however, that the nature of the guidance interventions experienced by clients had differential impacts.

Limitations of retrospective, longitudinal research

Focusing on a particular guidance intervention and asking recipients of the service to evaluate its effectiveness in retrospect, over a five year period, builds in errors related to human memory. As the study progressed, it became apparent that some clients were having difficulty in recalling precisely what happened during the interview under investigation. This often related to the action plans negotiated with practitioners, typically towards the end of interviews. However, the regularity of the follow-ups (every year) and the continuity of the researchers contacting clients, meant that clients' memories could be prompted by researchers referring to transcripts from previous years. This approach may represent a weakness in this investigation. Alternatively, it could be argued that such prompting enabled fuller

[39] Bimrose et al. (2004) Op cit.

accounts to emerge of the effects of the clients' guidance experiences on their subsequent careers.

Some key findings that have emerged from the data analysis are discussed in the following three sections.

3. Career decision making styles

Career decisions are amongst the most important people make throughout their lives, having significant implications for psychological, social and economic well-being (Amir, Gati & Keiman, 2008[40]; Gati & Tal, 2008[41]). They also figure amongst the most common vocational problems (Amir & Gati, 2006[42]; Osipow, 1999[43]) with difficulties in making career decisions resulting in avoiding the process altogether, halting it, or making a decision that is not ideal (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996[44]). It has been suggested that the primary goal of career guidance and counselling is to help clients make better decisions and that career decision making should be given much more prominence in practice interventions (Gati & Tal, 2008[45]). This section examines findings from the longitudinal research that assist our understanding of the ways in which adults in transition approach the decisions they make that either enhance, or inhibit, they career progression and development.

3.1 Introduction

The new Adult Advancement and Careers Service for England will be operational by August, 2010, with contracts for services awarded up to 2013. It aims:

> *…to create a single service which people can use to help them get on in their careers or into work, and to help overcome challenges in their lives.*
>
> (DIUS, 2008, p.6[46])

The vision for this new service extends beyond the previous government funded delivery model[47] to a more holistic and overarching universal approach – providing

[40] Amir, T., Gati, I., & Kleiman, T. (2008). Understanding and Interpreting Career Decision making Difficulties. *Journal of Career Assessment, 1*6(3), 281-309.
[41] Gati, I., & Tal, S. (2008). Decision making models of career guidance. In J. A. Athanasou & R. V. Esbroeck (Eds.), *International Handbook of Career Guidance* (pp. 157-186). London and New York: Springer Science + Business Media B.V.
[42] Amir, T. & Gati, I. (2006). Facets of career decision making difficulties. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* 34(4), 484-503.
[43] Osipow, S.H. (1999). Assessing career indecision. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 55 (1), 233-243.
[44] Gati, I., Krausz, M. & Osipow, S.H. (1996). A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision making. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 43(4), 510-526.
[45] Op cit.
[46] Department for Innovation Universities and Skills. (2008). *Shaping the Future – A new adult advancement and careers service for England.* London: HMSO. Retrieved 4 November 2008, from http://dius.ecgroup.net/files/133-08-SK_on.pdf.
[47]Which provided mainly information and advice for adult transitions into, through and out of education, training and employment, targeted at those with level 2 qualifications or below.

support for all adults[48] who are attempting to navigate the complexities of a volatile labour market, often over a significant span of their lifetime. The Prospectus for the new service acknowledges the complexities of adult career transitions, indicating how the new service will attempt to reconcile demands from the public domain (i.e. formal employment) with some elements of the private (e.g. family and home):

> *The advancement service will provide a universal offer – for all those in and out of work – and will also provide targeted support focusing on those with specific barriers to getting into and on in work: those seeking to return to work, for whom childcare is a barrier; those experiencing challenges, such as sudden redundancy; those who have worked hard for many years who are seeking to progress in their current job, or change career, but who lack the confidence or means to do so; or those at key transition points, such as reaching adulthood or retirement.*
>
> (DIUS, 2008, p.5[49])

For this more holistic approach to practice to be effective, an approach will be required that integrates an understanding of different decision making styles and the varied ways adults overcome barriers to their learning and career progression. The third and fourth reports on this longitudinal research (Bimrose et al., 2006[50]; Bimrose & Barnes, 2007a[51]) began to examine a typology of career decision making that had emerged from the data. The robustness of this fourfold typology will be scrutinised further below, against findings from the fifth and final year of data collection.

3.2 Career decision making, choice, risk and uncertainty

Risk and uncertainty have been identified as prominent characteristics of contemporary society (Paton, 2007[52]). People can no longer depend on continuity and stability – rather they have, increasingly, to accommodate uncertainty and change. This is particularly true in times of economic turbulence, which 'turn careers into multi-decisional, unpredictable and unstable paths' (Gati & Tal, 2008[53]). In adjusting to this changing context, individual decisions have to be made that involve

[48] In this context, adults are defined as being 19 years and over.
[49] Op cit.
[50] Op cit.
[51] Op cit.
[52] Paton, K. (2007). *Conceptualising 'Choice': A review of the theoretical literature* (No. 5, Working Paper). Southampton: University of Southampton. Retrieved 4 November 2008, from http://www.education.soton.ac.uk/files/projects/nphe/Working_Paper_5.pdf.
[53] Op cit.

selecting particular courses of action. Barriers frequently arise that impede individual progress. For example, finance may not be readily available to fund the education or training required to pursue an ambition; childcare is often not available (or not affordable) to support caregivers engaging with the demands of full time employment or training; transport can be a problem, especially in rural areas; chronic, long-term ill-health often prevents engagement with training and labour market opportunities; or broader care responsibilities (for elderly parents or partners suffering ill-health) restrict options.

Nevertheless, it is commonly assumed that individuals (particularly adults) are able to exercise choice. For example, deciding on a particular training course, which addresses a particular gap in an individual's skill profile, is likely to involve an individual in making a selection based on a number of criteria (such as cost, duration, entry requirements, geographical proximity, attendance requirements, start and finish times, quality of the institution offering the training, rates of successful completion, possible employment outcomes, etc.). At the most basic level, it can be argued that all individuals constantly exercise a degree of choice – for instance, around whether to remain unskilled, unemployed or under-employed, or to engage in action that may change their situation. However, the concept of 'choice' is an emotive subject. It divides opinion, with little consensus on whether individuals indeed ever act as free agents, or are constrained – at least in some measure - by social forces beyond their control (like their gender, age, ethnic origin, disability or socio-economic status).

In the careers context, this throws into sharp focus some fundamental issues for practice: are individuals actually able to navigate their way effectively and 'choose' their career biographies, in an increasingly complex labour market characterised by risk and uncertainty? Or do the social structures within which these individuals make decisions constrain their freedom to determine their own destiny? For either of these two scenarios, what, exactly, should be the role of careers advice and guidance? Is it to facilitate choice and support an individual in exercising their autonomy? Or is it to intervene, directly, to help individuals overcome barriers to progression, by (for example) advocating to employers and training providers on behalf of individuals? For example, if a woman returning to the labour market after a break to have a family wishes to enter a 'non-traditional' occupational area related to science, should guidance limit itself to ensuring that this client has information about the advantages and probable difficulties likely to accrue from such a career move? Or should it involve itself with work with suitable employers - canvassing on behalf of the client

and challenging the employer to change practices that are potentially discriminatory? It would appear that the new adult advancement and careers service in England will require practitioners to engage more with both formal and informal systems within which the client is making their transitions – especially those working with the 'hard to help', or individuals in the workplace.

Frameworks that have traditionally informed guidance practice have not commonly reconciled these distinct approaches to practice. Indeed, practitioners have tended to confine their interventions mainly to a focus on the individual client confined within an office location or community setting, rather than involving themselves with working with the systems that appear to constrain and confine individuals[54]. One such highly influential ideology that focuses on individual interventions to the exclusion of systems and that has dominated both the policy and practice of careers guidance over the past century relates to the rational choices made by autonomous individuals. Its key assumption is that individuals act rationally to maximise their personal benefits. This process of rational choice is based on logical deduction and clear reasoning, with individuals acting as free agents. However, there is an increasing weight of evidence that challenges the universality of this view of human behaviour. As early as 1955, it was noted by the late Nobel laureate Herbert Simon, that the rationality of human behaviour is limited by the ability of individuals to perform an objective and comprehensive analysis of vast amounts of information (Bubany, Krieshok, Black & McKay, 2008[55]). In relation to careers practice, criticisms of this approach to practice have grown recently and relate to, for example, its inability to respond appropriately to a fluid labour market, the impact of structural disadvantage and personal emotions (Bimrose & Barnes, 2007b[56]). More specifically, in relation to career decision making, a review of empirical literature on career decision making concluded that the decision making process does not, in reality, resemble the completely rational and conscious process typically assumed by much careers practice (Krieshok, 1998[57]).

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[54] For example, visiting an employer whom they suspect of discrimination, to challenge practices that are proving to be an insurmountable barrier to their clients.

[55] Bubany, S.T., Krieshok, T.S., Black, M.D., & McKay, R.A. (2008). College students' perspectives on their career decision making. *Journal of Career Assessment,* 16(2), 177-197.

[56] Bimrose, J., & Barnes, S.-A. (2007b). Styles of career decision making. *Australian Journal of Career Development,* 16(2), 20-27.

[57] Krieshok, T. S. (1998). An anti-introspectivist view of career decision making. *The Career Development Quarterly,* 46(3), 210-229.

However, the rationalist approach, or the so-called 'matching' model of careers guidance, has dominated the practice of guidance for over a century. It assumes that the best way to make career decisions is for individuals first, to assess their abilities, aptitudes, interests and achievements; second, to assess the requirements of particular jobs; and then thirdly, to 'match' these two sets of data to achieve the 'best fit' between their particular personal profile and a particular job. The continued popularity of this matching approach to guidance can be explained, partly, by its practical appeal. It provides practitioners with a clear rationale and framework for practice. Their role is clearly defined as 'expert', with specialist knowledge (e.g. about the labour market and the methods to assess individual suitability and capability for the labour market). A basic 'matching approach' can also be completed within a short time span. It can also accommodate the common public perception that careers experts 'tell you what you should do'. Consequently, it has been embraced enthusiastically by a range of stakeholders over a long time period.

Yet individuals do not always act in ways that optimise their self interest. Instead, they act habitually, normatively or simply irrationally (Paton, 2007[58]). That is, they remain in jobs in which they are under-employed, perhaps because this represents an easier option than finding opportunities to re-train. They do not attend job interviews, perhaps because they belong to the second or third generation of a family where claiming unemployment benefit has become a way of life. Or they leave a training course before completion, because a friend says it would be a 'waste of time'. A recent study into the career decision making process of working-class students in England found that they 'often failed to adopt a rational approach to career decision making' (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008[59]). This complements another recent study from the United States of America, which found that a rational orientation was the least common amongst participants (Bubany et al., 2008[60]). Certainly, findings from this research study support the view that a rational approach to career decision making is by no means universal and could even be adopted by only a minority of the population. Notions of adaptability and intuition need, therefore, to be incorporated in attempts to try to develop a more rigorous understanding of adult transitional and career behaviour. It follows that careers

[58] Op cit.
[59] Greenbank, P., & Hepworth, S. (2008). *Working class students and the career decision making process: A qualitative study*. Manchester: HECSU. Retrieved 10 November 2008, from http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/research_reports_278.htm.
[60] Op cit.

guidance practice that accommodates different decision making styles is more likely to be effective than one that is limited in scope to a technical rationalist approach.

3.3 Career decision making styles

Distinct styles of career decision making began to emerge from the data collected during the third year follow-up of this longitudinal study (Bimrose et al., 2006[61]). These 'styles' related to the ways in which individuals dealt with career and advancement related issues. Characteristic patterns of behaviour were found to recur across distinct groups of participants. These patterns were scrutinised further through an analysis of data from the fourth year (Bimrose & Barnes, 2007a[62]). A four-fold typology of decision making emerged clearly, which has been further tested against data collected from the fifth year of study (see Appendix 2)[63]. This typology, now verified against data collected from individuals over a three year time frame is discussed below. It should be noted that the same case studies have been selected for inclusion in this report as were included in the report from the fourth year of follow-up[64], to provide consistency and allow for verification of the claim that these styles have persisted, over time. Some duplication of material provided in the fourth report from the study has been inevitable. Summaries for each case are provided, together with illustrative quotes, to ensure that the 'voices' of the client participants are 'heard'. For some cases, quotations are provided on the way guidance is regarded by clients.

3.3.1 Evaluative careerists

Evaluative career decision making involves self-appraisal through the identification and evaluation of individual needs, values and abilities. In the third year of follow-up, six participants were demonstrating this style of decision making. In the fourth year of follow-up, the same six participants were still engaged in the same behaviours:

- a recurrent and ongoing process of critical self-reflection, based on emotional as well as practical considerations;
- an identification and evaluation of their individual needs, values and abilities;
- an increased understanding of the consequences of their decisions; and
- the integration of self-learning in future behaviour.

[61] Op cit.
[62] Op cit.
[63] For the final phase of data collection, a question was asked about decision making styles.
[64] Bimrose & Barnes (2007a) Op cit.

A degree of uncertainty and ambiguity is characteristic of this style, because there is always the possibility that the process of critical self-reflection might indicate a different future. Overall, five years after their case study interview, the individuals espousing this style have:

- enhanced their self-awareness about their particular skill sets;
- increased their self-confidence; and
- started to identify longer-term career goals.

An example used to illustrate this style of decision making in the report from the third year of follow-up (Bimrose & Barnes, 2007a[65]) relates to a client who was taking the first steps in returning to work, following a personal upheaval. This client was unqualified and had been a full time carer for her family. At the time of her case-study interview[66], she had recently become a single parent in receipt of benefits, needing to up-skill so that she could support herself. However, she was unable to achieve her primary career goal of vocational training because of its lack of availability locally, together with child-care responsibilities and financial difficulties arising from her relationship break-down. As an alternative, she enrolled 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 the realisation that she loved to learn), she applied for an Access course at her local higher education institution, which was compatible both with her longer term career ambition to develop a professional career that involved helping people (such as teaching) as well as her childcare responsibilities. Although circumstances have conspired to stall the career progression of this client (because of her lack of finance), she remains very positive and determined. She has a long term careers ambition to become a professional, helping people to learn despite any barriers that may have to be overcome. She sees guidance as playing a key role, both in her past and in her future.

[65] Op cit.

[66] 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).

Five years on:

When contacted for the fourth year of follow-up (which was the fifth year after her case study interview), this client reported how the previous year had proved to be something of: 'an emotional roller-coaster'. She was still sorting out the details of separation from her ex-partner. Now buying a property and still caring for her youngest child, she has taken a part-time job in a local restaurant to earn some money. The last year has been very stressful and she has suffered from ill health as a consequence. Constraints to her career advancement have been a mixture of domestic, emotional and financial – despite which she has taken full advantage of opportunities to take up free and subsidised learning opportunities to improve her qualifications and skills.

She has now successfully completed her Access course and had secured a university place, which has had to be deferred because of her difficult personal circumstances. Under pressure from the University to confirm acceptance of this place, she seems resigned to the unpredictability of her circumstances:

> *I've learned, you know, over the last five years, that there is no point in me really having a grand plan…there's going to be, you know, one step forward, two steps back!*

However, she is determined to undertake a degree, even if it means working, or studying, part-time to support her studies:

> *The next thing I'm going to put my mind to do, you know…is to do the University.*

She feels that she has changed for the better and is less fearful about her future. Now able to use computers confidently, she has also learnt how to write essays and dissertations. This has all been achieved slowly, in small steps. She used to think that other people automatically achieved things, but realises this is not the case. She feels that she can try to do anything and 'there is no stopping her'. Even her waitressing job is providing opportunities for learning – for example, she understands how important an inspiring manager is for motivating staff to do well in their jobs. This was confirmed by experiences at college, where staff and fellow students helped motivate and inspire her to persevere with her ambition to progress to a professional level. She can now see lots of possibilities for her future

career, broadly related to helping people. Her immediate career aim is to progress into higher education to take a degree.

She thinks that the guidance that she received during her initial case study interview was influential and the practitioner tactful. Indeed, she regards the guidance she received as life-changing:

> *…if I hadn't gone into the [guidance centre], I really don't know what would have happened to me, you know.*

Since then, she has benefited from a great deal of help from the careers guidance centre at the college where she did her Access course and thinks she will call in there in the future:

> *You know, you need another person who can give you the time and actually go through the form with you. You want someone there with a pencil to say, 'Right, this is what you want to do.*

The college also provided access to telephones. This client also reported a good experience with JobCentre Plus:

> *I had a very helpful woman down in my JobCentre… ...it was just nice to have someone else to talk to. And she wasn't a threat.*

Though from what others have said, she understands this is not always the case:

> *…a lot of people that are on benefits, and stuff, they see the benefit people as the enemy.*

[Interview 2]

A second example of a client demonstrating an evaluative style of decision making is provided by a graduate who had been employed for three years in administration with a small company and then become very disillusioned with his job. A process of reflection brought him to the decision that he wanted to change his career, but there were a number of practical issues to overcome. He had a mortgage on his house, wanted to remain in the same geographical area and did not drive, so was dependent on public transport. After completing a psychometric test, as suggested by the guidance practitioner, he started to explore his options, investing 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 to research and apply for alternative jobs. Weighing all his constraints and options carefully, he eventually identified teaching as a possible option. After a further process of research, he concluded it was, indeed, financially and practically feasible. He therefore applied for teacher training and was accepted onto a course. However, a few months into the course, and after further reflection, he decided that teaching had not been the right career choice for him after all. He, therefore, left before completing. He returned to work in the sector in which he had been employed previously and had a rapid promotion to a management position.

Five years on:

Still with the same employing organisation as the previous year, this client is now manager of a different team. Although he feels that he has progressed professionally, he recognises his present job does not provide any job satisfaction. In his current job, he has noticed that promotions to higher levels are based on 'putting on a front or image', rather than on individual ability. He is now reconciled to being 'stuck' in his present job for the foreseeable future because it is:

> *...the only place that I could earn the wage that I needed, you know, to keep the house and stuff like that…*

Whilst recognising he is likely to gain some benefits from this job, he does not particularly wish to stay. Personal finances are a major consideration, partly because ill-health has prevented his wife from working in the past and may do so in the future. He has, however, attended a course on freelance comedy writing and is also trying to write features for magazines. Another career option he is considering is moving from a management to a specialist role within his sector. A key issue over the next two to three years will be whether he and his wife decide to start a family.

He does not see himself as ambitious:

> *I'm not particularly career-motivated… …I talk about wanting a change of career, but I've never been particularly career-minded. So all I've really wanted is to do something I enjoy, rather than to further my career or anything like that.*

He recognises how he makes career decisions, reflects on them and then changes his mind. He wishes he could be more spontaneous, rather than thinking through all the implications of possible choices.

> *I'm always thinking, "Ooh, if I do this, then that'll happen and that'll happen". I think in some ways I'd be better if I was a lot more spontaneous with issues like that…*

He remembers that at his initial case study interview, he was encouraged to use contacts to talk to people about alternative careers. It did not, however, have any direct, positive outcome, because of his particular (mainly financial) constraints:

> *I think I went for the advice almost desperately hoping that it would be like the magic answer that would get me out of (my job) and into something linked to geography… ...In terms of the advice given, I could see it made sense. I just don't think it was applicable to my situation, particularly… ...I can't think of anything they could have done differently that wouldn't cost an absolute fortune.*

He has not had any subsequent guidance, but did state:

> *I wish more than anything else that in my final year of university, I'd actually used the careers service more and taken advantage of just the contacts and the names of companies and stuff…*

[Interview 26]

Like the other cases of evaluative career decision making style in this study, these clients were demonstrating recurring, persistent and distinctive patterns of behaviour when trying to progress their careers. Before moving to any action, they reflected on possible options, evaluated each, and then reflected again on possible consequences. This process often does not end here. They continue to reflect on where decisions have led – so the process of career choice becomes an iterative process of reflection, evaluation, reflection, action (or non-action), reflection, etc.

3.3.2 Strategic careerists

Representing more focused decision making, a second style that has emerged from the data is a strategic approach, based on cognitive processing. Here, an individual bases their choices on an assessment of options and then formulates plans

(sometimes detailed) to achieve a focused goal that maximise benefits for them. Through this process, decisions are made which are primarily based on rational conditions (Baron, 2000[67]). Strategic careerists are committed to 'moving on' and see their careers as something they activity construct. Typically, they believe that their current position, and/or organisational attachment, represents just one phase of a career that could involve relatively frequent changes. They are reconciled to the need to adapt and update their skills, knowledge and understanding constantly. Seven individuals demonstrated this approach to career progression three years after their initial case study interview[68]. This approach is characterised by:

- a rational appraisal of information as the basis for action;
- a steadfast focus on a career goal together with a 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.

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 companies at a careers fair and accepted one of the three jobs subsequently offered. Then she manoeuvred herself into 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. This tenacious approach to working towards her ultimate goal is combined with the acceptance that success will require concerted effort on her part.

Five years on:

She is still with same company, living in the same flat and with the same partner. She has, however, been promoted to a senior position within the same team.

[67] Baron, J. (2000). *Thinking and Deciding* (3rd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[68] One 'strategic' client was lost to the fifth year of data collection, but one other – who had not been contacted for the third year of follow-up, was successfully contacted for the final year.

Employed in a very competitive industry in which progression routes are not clear-cut, she expressed annoyance that there is favouritism in working life and a need to prove one's own worth continually. Initially, she found working life challenging, but now feels she has adapted to the demands of the job, become more resilient and has a more balanced and controlled approach to her life, pursuing other interests. Her partner is moving abroad and she plans to go with him within a year:

> *I started to feel that (a city) was not where I wanted to be any more, just sort of struggling. And it's so expensive and you pay loads of taxes. It's so cold and miserable. I just thought, you know, I could easily go and live abroad and why don't I do that? Instead of just thinking what might happen, why not make it happen!*

Her company has a branch in the country to which she is moving, so she may get a job within the same company, or apply for a similar job. She has already purchased a flat and sees this as a longer-term move. Eventually, she hopes to have a family and feels that a base abroad would be better suited for this than England. She is sure that the decision to move abroad is the right one for her career. Her next goal is to build client relationships in a business environment.

At first, she wanted to earn money and was driven by this, together with a need to be independent. The other influencing factor in her career decision making was the training opportunities actually available. For example, she was interested in law, and researched this option, but saw it as too academic and leading to a 'heavy' workload – not providing sufficient benefit. Another example of her strategic approach to her career decision making relates to a move she made within her company:

> *I took some time off and I weighed things up and, you know, I had about a week off. Just to think about what I wanted to do…thinking about things logically I…definitely made the right choice… ...in the end I made a really positive decision and it's actually worked out much better… ...I'm always trying to think kind of two or three steps ahead – thinking around things before they can happen…so if anything bad does happen I know I can…offer a different way round it.*

She does not think that the guidance she received in her initial case study interview was very influential and feels it would have been helpful to have had more ideas

about available options at the time of the interview. She has not had any further formal career guidance, but said:

> *I've been thinking about speaking to a proper careers adviser…it would be interesting to speak to somebody and see how I can sort of tailor my skills…*
>
> [Interview 6]

Another example is a client who, at the time of his case study interview, was working in sales. He felt he was not being rewarded for the responsibility his job involved and seemed generally discontent with his work. Before his guidance 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 a 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 required, he also undertook 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.

Five years on:

His original motivation to become a physiotherapist remains high and he is very close to realising his career goal. This client was still on a physiotherapy degree with six months to go before qualifying. He describes this as 'scary', as everything hinges on what happens next. Feeling impatient with the academic work, he is ready to start work and already planning a smooth transition into employment. For example, he is establishing good relationships with placement contacts and is building up a network that should help with future job search.

> *…even though I'm a student, I just try to roll my sleeves up and get stuck in and be part of the team as much as I can, rather than just follow people around and doing the basics. You know, I try to get myself known – go out of my way to try and help out a bit. I think it's been noticed…a couple of people who are involved with hiring junior physios have noticed…and have told me they'd be happy to take me on.*

He is more confident now about the job situation than he was six months ago, but he feels he needs to be proactive rather than rely on others. For example:

> *There's a banking system…where you can volunteer to do weekends and night shifts and whatnot at the hospital… …you go in as a sort of number two to a senior physio… ...the bank staff get to hear about the new jobs first. And if you're already in there and doing a good job …then when the next full-time job comes up, then you're high up on the list… ...I don't think that's common knowledge.*

With the benefit of hindsight says he would probably make the same decision to give up his job, but may have looked at other options too. It has taken a long time and he has had to place other parts of his life 'on hold' – like starting a family:

> *…time is ticking away…and we want to start a family sooner rather than later…that's the plan!*

This client is already planning how his future career as a physiotherapist will unfold:

> *The next couple of years will be about working towards…the area in which I want to work, so you know, quite a long process.*

[Interview 45]

A rational approach to decision making has been found to be beneficial in helping career undecided women make occupational and educational choices (Tinsley, Tinsley & Rushing, 2002[69]). This appears to be the case for one woman in this 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 options and decided that self-employment represented the best, since it allowed her to reconcile child-care responsibilities with her own career development needs. After weighing various options, she decided to train for garden design, with the intention of setting up as self-employed and enrolled on a Foundation Degree. However, two years into her course (at the third year of follow-up), she had decided to take time out of the course, because studying was preventing her from dedicating the time needed to grow her business. Upon discovering that her course was being transferred to another location, she reversed this discussion, on the basis of a

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

process of logical reasoning, as she decided this optimised the benefits to her and her family.

Five years on:

This client had made what she described as: 'a complete U turn' - changing her mind about taking time out of her course. This was mainly because she had discovered that it was being transferred from one educational institution to another, so the option to return to study at some future stage to complete the third year of her course would not have existed. Overall, she feels that this decision has been a good one – it will, she feels, give her business a competitive edge, as most garden designers have an HNC qualification. A Foundation Degree will have a slightly higher status. She has joined two local networks, which are 'small enough to enable you to get something out of', and providing a great deal of support and practical help.

She has also attempted to develop a marketing strategy by placing an advert in the Yellow Pages. She recognises building her business is likely to be a slow process, until she is able to establish her reputation, but has made the occupational transition she set out to make:

> *I feel not only a garden designer – I'm a business woman now! I may not be…slick or hugely successful yet – but I'm not a failure!*

She is aware of her decision making style:

> *I probably think about things a bit too much, if anything. Sometimes I wish I didn't! Sometimes I wish I'd be a bit more impulsive and just go for things. But, you know, it's some, some part of your personality and it's difficult to change that…so no, I definitely consider in detail everything I do.*

She values, greatly, the guidance she received:

> *The process was really useful – not just the one thing – the aptitude test and the interview.*

The test showed her that she had the capability to 'chase the dream' and helped build her confidence. The guidance interview:

> *…triggered the chain of events that have pointed me in the direction I'm*

going at the moment.

She has a single career goal: to establish her garden design business as successful and is working steadily to achieve this goal.

[Interview 40]

These three examples of strategic decision making provide strong examples of methodical process of assessing options to identify the most advantageous outcome that is so characteristic of this approach.

The two remaining career decision making styles relate to those participants who have distant career goals (aspirational) and those who remain largely undecided (opportunistic).

3.3.3 Aspirational careerists

In stark contrast to 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 their ultimate career aspiration - yet for them represented relevant and legitimate choices. 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' – to provide the necessary finance – which, therefore, 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'. The same three clients that were demonstrating this approach to career decision making during the third year of follow-up were still demonstrating this style four years after their case study interview.

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

- the tendency to identify vaguely focused, but distant goals, with personal and/ or career issues intertwined);
- 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.

One individual had established herself in a highly successful career in retail management, became dissatisfied and so decided to change direction. However, before she was ready to re-train for her long term aspirational career goal, other important issues in her life needed resolution. At the time of her third follow-up interview, for example, she was focused on securing her financial future. Then it appeared likely that she would get married and start a family, before applying herself to re-focusing her career and achieving her ultimate career goal. At the previous follow-up interview, she remarked: 'I'm just beginning to think about a career…'. By the final year of this study, she had married, changed job and was thinking of starting a family. Her long term career goal has remained constant.

Five years on:

Over the previous year, this client had moved job from one employer to another, within the same sector. The company she now works for is a large multi-national with plenty of opportunities for training and promotion. Although her status had decreased in her new job, her pay had actually increased. She has also married. Perhaps because of this, her values have shifted away from being very ambitious, to wanting to achieve more of a work-life balance.

> *I just don't think any amount of money's worth going to a job that makes you feel bad… …I like to keep a calm life now… …I just don't think any sort of career is worth jeopardising your life for - 'cos you only live once - so the idea is to make the best of it!*

Over the past five years, she feels that she has grown up and matured - understanding the value of money, as well as herself, better. Because of various job changes and promotions, she feels that her job-related skills have improved. She has had the chance to observe how others operate and learned from the many work-related challenges with which she has had to deal. Her self-confidence has also increased.

The client still feels that the guidance she received during her initial case study interview was useful. Although her reason for seeking out guidance in the first

place was to move away from her current occupational sector, the guidance confirmed that she was, actually, in the right area of work. Although she has had no formal guidance since, she would definitely consider seeing a practitioner again in the future.

She describes how she makes career decisions:

> *…the heart normally feels disheartened and then the brain starts ….the brain takes a while to get into action… …I think I get an idea into my head and then I think about it for a very long time and then it sort of grows and grows and grows … …but it does take a long time...I make career decisions on whether I'm happy or not – its all about just, sort of, how I feel… …I suppose confidence is another aspect.*

And explains how she believes compromises are required:

> *You perhaps make a decision for a slightly less entertaining job…because you need the money – and obviously money rules the world!...I suppose everybody dreams, don't they… ...if the money was…there, what they would do?*

Although her medium term career goal is to progress within her present employing organisation, her long term goal remains exactly the same as that identified five years ago at the case study interview. Events organisation, she feels, would still offer her the opportunities to combine her training and artistic flair with her passion for this area of work:

> *I have always, sort of, like I say, dreamt of doing events… …owning my own business and doing something from home – organising bits and pieces…*

At the moment, she is developing this interest outside of formal employment, believing that it is more likely that she will get into this area of work by developing experience through voluntary work – like helping to organise fund raising events for play-groups or volunteering to help a charity organise some sort of event.

> *It would be something I would love to get into, but I think it would have to be that somebody says to me: "Oh, there's this job going", you know, "Do you know anybody?" And then me thinking: "That's me!" - sort of thing.*

[Interview 5]

Another example of this type of decision making is one client who aspires to work that would provide scope to use his creative energies. First, he wanted to be an artist and sell his paintings. Then he talked of becoming a creative writer. Initially, he took a job as a media technician in a local school, simply because 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'. It did, however, provide the financial support he needed to paint and 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. He described this in exactly the same way as his previous administrative job: 'mind numbingly boring', and planned to resign: 'I don't really care about money, or jobs, or things like that…I really care about whether I'm actually producing anything.' Five years on, this client was still in administration and finding an outlet for his creative abilities in his music.

Five years on:

This client had been planning to give up his job and start a new life in the South West of England in an attempt to foster his creativity. This didn't happen because of illness in the family, though he is self-critical for not going:

> *I used it as an excuse to bottle it and not go. I wish I hadn't have done now, but yeah, I stayed. I was a bit disappointing.*

For the last year he has been employed in an administrative job that involves data entry, describing himself as a: 'number puncher'. Although he is not enjoying this work, he says of his employing organisation: 'It's a good place to work'. It is better paid than his previous employment and offered a permanent contract, with no probationary period:

> *If that's what I'd set out to achieve, I would be very happy in the job, but that's not what I do for fun… ...they're happy with my work and…there's no stress…*

He has found an outlet for his creativity in his music:

I just write songs and play them…I'm very happy doing that.

This client is instrumental in his approach to employment – it is simply a means to an end:

I am the kind of person who will jump onto one thing, then another. But the thing that's always been there is my guitar…I'm quite happy resigning myself to bumming around in most jobs…it seems quite romantic to me.

His aspiration is still to earn a living by being creative:

What I'd like to do is have the nerve to just go off and take the guitar and play places, and just get by that way and not know what's going to happen.

Initial access to guidance was prompted by having been in a job for three years where the money was poor and there were no challenges. The guidance did not help him because the issue was financial - he could not retrain because there was no funding available. Now, he feels that he can find what he needs for himself on the internet and that guidance would not be able to do any more for him:

That's what they offer - a computer and a few databases and then when you say, "How am I going to fund this?", they clam up…I wouldn't go to anybody for career advice because I wait for everything to align first, that's the problem.

He wishes his career decision making style could be more 'whimsical'. He was brought up to avoid risk, but it not entirely comfortable with this, feeling it has stopped him doing some of the things he wants to do. Ideally, he would like secure the funding necessary to do a course that would enable him to move into a more satisfying career - where there would be more creative, 'warmer' people:

…people who aren't necessarily driven…so I don't know where that is, but I long to go somewhere, wherever that would be…

About his current situation, he says:

I am toying with the idea of asking if I can go part-time at work. Work three days a week and spend more time trying to get my ideas together. But at the moment I'm reluctant because money would be even tighter…This is a complete farce of an existence but I'm not going to get miserable about it!…I

don't particularly want to get anywhere or get loads of money.

[Interview 37]

Aspirational career decision makers could appear to lack commitment to developing a career. Current employment often represents a temporary solution to a longer term problem – providing the resources necessary to progress towards what is often a much longer term career goal.

3.3.4 Opportunistic careerists

The fourth and final style of career decision making identified from the data describes those individuals who have taken opportunities that have presented themselves, often unexpectedly, and tried (sometimes successfully) to turn them to their advantage. Opportunist careerists have a distinctly different approach to career decision making compared with the other three styles explored above. They exploit available opportunities rather than make conscious choices about work. As a consequence, career ideas are likely to appear 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 & Krumboltz, 1999;[70] Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996[71]; Hambly, 2007[72]) and the need for practitioners to place greater importance on context (Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld & Bell, 2005[73]). 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

[70] Mitchell, K.E., Levin, A.S., & Krumboltz, J.D. (1999). Planned happenstance: constructing unexpected career opportunities. *Journal of Counseling and Development,* 77(2), 115-124.
[71] Hodkinson, P., Sparkes, A.C., & Hodkinson, H. (1996). *Triumphs and Tears: Young People, Markets and the Transition from School to Work*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
[72] Hambly, L. (2007). New theory: Implications for guidance practice. *Career Guidance Today,* 15(3), 30-33.
[73] Bright, J.E.H., Pryor, R.G.L., Wilkenfeld, S., & 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.

- flexibility of approach.

Ten research participants in the third year follow-up displayed this pattern of decision making behaviour, which has certain similarities with Harren's (1979[74]) 'intuitive' decision making style. One dropped out after the third year, leaving the remaining nine still demonstrating this style of career decision making in the fourth year of follow-up.

A vivid illustration of this approach to career decision making is provided by a client who came for guidance at the case study interview still unsure of her career direction. After completing her education, she worked abroad for six months as a beauty therapist. On her return home, she completed some further vocational qualifications in this area to enhance her employability in complementary therapies. This led to her employment in a full-time job and in part-time employment in two different occupational sectors (custodial care and sports/ leisure). She continued to take full advantage of training opportunities, but problems emerged in her full-time employment. 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. In the final year of this study, she had returned to work and had moved back into her family home to save money. She was still undecided about what to do, with several possibilities under consideration.

Five years on:

This client had now returned to her full-time job, after a short period of stress-related absence and is still living at home with her parents to save money. Learning new skills and gaining qualifications is still a priority. Still unsure about what she wants to do in the longer term:

> *I don't know, really. I don't think I have any aims, which is bad, really…in terms of where I'm going, I don't really know. I'm still in the dark really with that.*

One idea is to train to be a nurse, so that she can travel and work abroad:

> *My friend has gone there (country), working as a nurse and I was quite*

[74] Harren, V. A. (1979). A model of career decision making for college students. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 14(2), 119-133.

depressed when she told me. I was quite envious – yeah, really!

Finances, however, currently force her to be 'realistic'. This has caused her to turn down a job recently for which she was recently head-hunted, because it meant relocation and higher living costs, which she can not afford at the moment. Now she regrets this decision and feels the change to a completely new area of work may have been a good opportunity. Recognising she finds making decisions a challenge, she discussed this job offer with many of her friends and family:

I think everyone! Everyone I knew, "Ooh what shall I do?" It was really hard! I'm someone who will do it if someone tells me (laughing). If you say, "Yeah", then, "OK I'll go and do that". I'm not very good...I'm not very good with decisions. I never normally do it myself.

Reflecting on the way she approaches choices:

I wish I'd had...I wish I'd done more…I do kind of regret, I do things backwards in a way. Oh well, I'm here now, yeah!

Quite regretful about other past career decisions, because they represent lost opportunities, she reflected on wanting to train to be a teacher - though at the same time is relieved she did not:

I don't want to be a teacher full-time, because it's so draining.

Overall, she would like to travel to America and Australia, but simply does not know what job she wants to do in the future:

…in terms of where I'm going, I don't really know. I'm still in the dark really with that…I'm always very adaptable…so I can pretty much adapt myself to anything.

Having money, she feels, would enable her to become more focused and achieve more:

Until I…earn some more money…get loads of money…then I can have more of a goal.

So, her one definite plan is to save money.

[Interview 27]

A second example of this approach relates to a client who was made redundant from a teaching position. She immediately undertook further training courses to enable her to retain a foothold in education. To supplement her income, she took on two part-time jobs, then applied for a series of other part-time jobs, capitalising on opportunities that presented themselves through local networks. 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 began to feel dissatisfied and restless: 'I'm good at being a jack-of-all-trades and master of none.' In the fifth year of this study, she was still working across a number of part-time jobs and continued to be undecided about her future career direction: 'Here I am at (late forties) and I still don't know what I want to do!'.

Five years on:

Despite feeling dissatisfied and restless a year ago, this client continues to work as a part time lecturer in Further Education, where there have been some significant organisational changes. Looking back over the past five years, she regards this period as a: `mega mid life crisis' and feels she has now: 'crawled back through.' She is still teaching on a range of courses. Although she dislikes some elements, she enjoys others. Last year, she had embarked on three vocational training courses. One of these training courses is not yet completed because: 'it's so boring and just time consuming'. She also withdrew from another because: 'it was a disaster'. Her plans to apply for other jobs have not been realised. She still works in a café and a local theatre, because she likes to be involved in different things:

> *I don't like to do just one thing. I like to have lots of different ideas going on…I like to pick up completely new things and start again…*

She is enjoying her current teaching work, with her line manager providing an appropriate level of support and recognition:

> *I really like where I work. The women are lovely and we have a really good time and work well as a group. My boss - she and I work particularly well together. She's very good at recognising people's strengths and weaknesses and supporting them and has made sure we're all working at*

our level.

The client has not sought further guidance and her reflections on the initial interview are largely consistent with previous years. She feels that so much knowledge is available easily that we use professionals in a different way:

You practically go there and tell the doctor what's wrong with you and they just nod and agree.

This is how she regards her initial guidance – she went with ideas and the adviser agreed:

I was using (practitioner) as a sounding board.

She would, however, encourage her children to use guidance services, since:

It's good to talk to someone.

This client sees her career progression as something that has happened to her, rather than resulting from a planned approach: She is adamant that she would not do something she did not want to do as her father was unhappy in his career. About most of her jobs she says:

I kind of fell into it by accident!

She does not have career goals. Ideas about possible options are stumbled upon by chance. For example, she is currently getting a 'buzz' from looking at what her department could be offering. So thinks marketing may be a future option. She does not see herself as 'academic', regarding herself as more suited to vocational qualifications. Then indicates how undertaking a degree at a distance seems like an interesting option. She also talks about going abroad. Looking back, she is amazed she stayed in one job for nine years, as she is aware of her tendency not to stay with the same thing for long. She lives in a world of possibilities and acknowledges that making things happen is challenging for her:

I think I am really good at ideas, what I'm not very good at is carrying them out…I like the idea of being slightly different…

Not having a clear goal is, however, a difficulty:

I still don't know what it is I want to do. I feel frustrated because I feel there's

something out there that would suit me perfectly and everything I've done so far like teaching I just fell into, because it fitted in with my life at the time.

The primary responsibility for making any changes she regards as her own:

I do it on my own…if I get an idea I just want to go with that idea and suffer the consequences if it doesn't work out.

Like many others, she regards financial realities as operating as a major barrier to her career progression. She needs to earn a reasonable salary and accepts that this can mean staying in work that is not completely fulfilling. However, with the benefit of hindsight, she recognises the value of the range of different job experiences she has had over the past years, so is able to see her redundancy as a positive development. As a consequence, she now feels more confident and resilient:

The really good thing about this is that's it's made me realise I could do anything I want really…I'm not frightened by change now.

For this individual, therefore, future options are many, but overall she remains undecided:

Here I am at (late forties) and I still don't know what I want to do! I'd quite like to work for myself but I don't really know what the business would be. My limitation is that I still don't know what I want to do!

[Interview 31]

Opportunistic careerists display a very distinctive style of behaviour and engage in different 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, or planned, choices themselves.

The next section presents some observations about the relationship between these four decision making styles and clients' views about their past and possible futures.

3.4 Career hopes and career decision making styles

As part of the final year of investigation, clients' were asked to reflect upon what they might have done differently and what their fantasy job would be. Analysis of responses revealed a range of response, some of which appear to relate to their career decision making styles.

3.4.1 What might clients have done differently?

When asked if, with the benefit of hindsight, they would have done anything differently, all six of the evaluative career decision making clients responded reflectively – recognising that they would be in a better employment position if they had not made certain choices (like staying in a particular job, not acting quickly enough in some instances or too quickly in others). They were more likely than others in the sample to think about their current situation in terms of whether opportunities not taken up could have been more suitable

In contrast, all seven of the strategic career decision making clients did not believe that they should, or could, have done anything differently over the last five years. One suggested that she could have: 'sort of pushed on, accelerated my professional growth quite quickly' [Interview 10], but explained that her slow progress was the consequence of her learning and development requests being dismissed by her manager. As would be expected with strategic career decision makers, plans had been made and followed over the five years. Their career trajectories were as they had expected them to be and they were happy that this was so.

There was no particular pattern that could be detected in the responses of the three clients with aspirational decision making styles. Two indicated that they would not have done anything differently over the last five years. This could be explained by the small numbers in the sample.

Finally, and perhaps as could be expected, most of the opportunistic career decision makers talked about missed opportunities. Most recalled delays they had made in making decisions, which had impacted negatively on them – now feeling that they should have been 'more positive'. Two did not feel that they could have done anything differently.

3.4.2 'Ideal' jobs

One of the final questions asked of clients related to the job would they like to do, given a completely free choice. Responses again seemed to resonate with career decision making styles.

Strategic career decision makers were perfectly happy with their current choice. Some were working towards what they considered to be their ideal job, with clear plans to achieve this goal.

For aspirational career decision makers, their ideal jobs were their 'fantasy' jobs – with these aspirations confirmed in each year of this study. These individuals were tenacious in working towards their ideal, even though it was likely to be hard to achieve and in the distant future.

Evaluative career decision makers had ambitions linked to personal likes, dislikes, and skills. For example, one wished to run a campsite in France:

> *I'd probably would go and run a campsite in France, given the complete freedom. Because it's a business where I'd use my financial skills. And because I like France and I like camping… And the wine's cheap, so I'm there!*
>
> [Interview 29]

Another identified writing as their ideal:

> *I would like to be a writer I think, writing short stories and, you know, like articles for magazines and stuff. Not a journalist but, you know, a more relaxed kind of type job, I think that would probably be my ideal one… …I've just always liked writing.*
>
> [Interview 26]

The majority of opportunistic career decision makers had what might be regarded as slightly unconventional ideas for their ideal jobs. These ranged from wrestler, to chocolate taster, to football player. For most in this group, ideal jobs represented a complete contrast to their current employment, requiring significant retraining and lifestyle changes. For instance, one client in a junior management position in the catering sector identified alternative therapy as their ideal.

Although these data represent only tentative findings, they do seem to indicate that there is a strong possibility that career decision making styles have profound implications for the ways in which individuals will approach a whole range of career-

related behaviours and form their perceptions about career-related issues. The next section examines some of the possible implications for guidance practice of the four decision making styles examined above.

3.5 Implications for practice

Career interventions are not quick or simple and practitioners need to 'allow for less certainty in outcomes, less decidedness, and less surety' (Krieshok, 2001, p. 215[75]). A recent review of IAG by the Skills Commission (2008) noted how practice in England is dominated by an approach that is now over a hundred years old and was developed in very different labour market and social conditions (Skills Commission, 2008[76]). Indeed, evidence from this research study supports the view that this paradigm remains strongly influential[77]. The challenge for effective guidance practice is to ensure that frameworks guiding work with clients are sufficiently flexible and responsive to varied decision making preferences that clients bring and the contexts in which they are making their labour market transitions. Of course, this assumes that career decision making styles are fixed and cannot be changed, so need to be accommodated by guidance practice. Further investigation may well reveal that they could be changed and modified, as a result of training. However, this would require agreement about which 'ideal type' of decision making style should be selected at the standard of good practice.

Bringing about fundamental change to practice will involve reconciling the constraints placed by the scarcity of resources on practice with the real, rather than imagined, needs of clients. There is obviously an urgent need to justify the investment of public funds in guidance services with pressures to demonstrate its economic value. However, such pressures have tended to place an emphasis on the quantifiable outcomes of guidance (usually relating to placement into education, training or employment), which have been used as the main means whereby the efficacy of guidance services has been judged. Research evidence increasingly suggests that these alone are not sufficient as indicators of the effectiveness of guidance.

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[75] Krieshok, T. S. (2001). How the decision making literature might inform career centre practice. *Journal of Career Development*, 27(3), 207-216.

[76] Skills Commission. (2008). *Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising our Potential in the 21st Century. The final report of the Skills Commission's inquiry into information, advice and guidance (IAG).* London: Policy Connect. Retrieved 16 April 2008 from http://www.edge.co.uk/docs/content/sc_iag_inquiry_final_report.pdf.

[77] For example, computed aided guidance was used in 21 of the 50 case study interviews and most of these types of computer programmes are based on the matching principle (Bimrose et al., 2004, Op cit.).

The career decision making styles discussed above demonstrate the irrelevance of imposing an approach to guidance that assumes all clients are going to be 'rational', 'strategic' or 'planful' in their decision making. Moreover, a significant proportion of clients are likely to react negatively to this type of approach. If, irrespective of individual clients' preferences for dealing with their world, an approach to guidance is imposed on them that focuses on assessing achievements, abilities and aptitudes, so that these can be 'matched' with the best fit opportunity, services may run the risk of alienating clients. For example, many of the clients who illustrated either 'aspirational' or 'opportunistic' approaches to decision making stated that they would not return for further guidance. Their responses are illuminating, with this finding meriting further investigation. Some clients recognised that they had access to all the information they might need through the internet. Their need, therefore, was for something more. They needed help with the interpretation of the meaning of that information for their own personal context and circumstances, support in making decisions and following through. This might include help with reconciling themselves to not having immediate access to the financial resources needed to pursue their ideal options. Or they may need assistance with developing a different future scenario for themselves. Undoubtedly, some practitioners do work from frameworks based on new approaches to practice[78]. Yet adopting such approaches place practitioners at risk of not being able to meet targets related to quantifiable outcomes.

The situation where guidance practice is still heavily influenced by the matching paradigm presents a major challenge in providing high quality guidance services for adults that clients value and want to use. Practitioners should be required, and supported, to engage with continuing professional development that keeps them up-to-date with new thinking, practice and research findings. They need encouragement in taking the risks in their practice that would enable them to try out new approaches, perhaps through the more widespread introduction of supervisory practice and greater familiarisation with web-based approaches to guidance. In addition, the broad community of guidance practice needs to take responsibility for developing measures of 'softer' outcomes for guidance interventions. The concept of 'distance travelled' also needs to be accepted, respected and integrated into service delivery, both by practitioners and their managers at different levels. These, and other,

[78] See, for example: Patton, W. (2008). Recent developments in career theories: the influences of constuctivism and convergence. In J. A. Athanasou & R. V. Esbroech (Eds.), *International Handbook of Career Guidance* (pp. 133-156). London and New York: Springer Science + Business Media B.V.

challenges associated with evaluating the effectiveness of guidance is further discussed in section 6 of this report. The next section documents some further perceptions of clients about guidance and explores aspects of their changing career trajectories, with recommendations about how some of these issues could be addressed presented in section 8, on recommendations.

4. 'Useful' guidance and its impact

Gathering evidence of the impact of publically funded services is essential. Yet the form that this evidence takes, the sources from which it is gathered and the time frame over which it is gathered are all contentious issues. Different types and sources of evidence serve different purposes, with the legitimacy and credibility of different types of evidence being a key issue. From whose perspective is the evidence of impact being evaluated? How is this evaluated? Whose account of the nature of that impact is regarded as most important? Is it possible to evaluate a service that is designed to make an impact on individuals who are socially located - and therefore exposed to multiple influences that constantly interact? Can impact even be attributed to one particular intervention? Section 6, below, discusses these and other complexities associated with the measurement of guidance impact. This particular section is highly relevant to that broader discussion. It focuses on: the consumers' (that is, the clients') perceptions of guidance, formed over a five year period, their perceptions of the limitations of guidance and clients' expectations of what it should deliver.

4.1 Changing perceptions of 'useful' guidance?

Clients' views of guidance services (especially those that have been formed with the benefit of hindsight, over an extended period of time), provide a crucial part of the overall evidence-base for effective guidance. In this investigation, the term 'useful' was selected as the most appropriate for probing clients' perceptions of effectiveness (see Bimrose et al., 2004[79]). In the first year of the study (2003/04), 49 of the 50 participating clients (98%) reported that their guidance had been 'useful'. Over the five year period of the study, this proportion decreased to 19 of the 29 clients (66%) who were successfully followed-up in the final year. In 2004/05, 87% (n=39) of the 45 clients who were contacted still felt that the guidance they had received had been 'useful'. By 2005/06, this had reduced to 72% (n=26) and in 2006/07, the proportion had reduced further to 77% (n=23). By the final year of the study (2007/08), another 11% reduction was recorded (as indicated above, 66% (n=19) of clients still regarding their guidance as 'useful').

[79] Op cit.

The overall attrition rate for this study has been low, with the reasons for withdrawal of clients from the study largely unknown (see section 2.7, above). It may, indeed, be the case that some withdrew their participation because they felt increasingly negative about their guidance as the years went by. However, it does appear that many simply moved location, with contact being lost for this reason. At least one withdrew because she felt that there was no progress on her career to report. She had recently had a baby and so was engaged in full-time in childcare – she did not regard this phase of her life as part of her 'career'!

By comparing the responses from the 29 clients who did remain in the study over the five year period, a pattern of change in their overall perceptions emerges

- immediately after their guidance interview, 100% (n=29) of the final participants reported that they had found it useful;
- one year on, 90% (n=26) still indicated the guidance had been useful, with 10% (n=3) less sure;
- two years on, 79% (n=23) indicated it was useful, 17% (n=5) were less sure and one other had a more limited memory;
- three years on, the same proportion indicated its usefulness, 79% (n=23), with 7% (n=2) now less sure and 14% (n=4) having limited, or no, recall of the intervention;
- four years on, 69% (n=20) of clients still believed that the guidance had been useful, with 21% (n=6) being less sure of its usefulness and 10% (n=3) having either limited, or no, recollection.

Despite the percentage of clients remaining positive about their guidance having decreased by 31%, well over half remaining in the study over the period of five years still viewed their guidance as having been 'useful' to them[80].

4.2 What is 'useful' guidance?

As indicated above, of the 29 clients in the final sample, the majority (69%, n=20) regarded the influence of their guidance on their career direction and decisions as having been positive. For some, its impact had been profound. Three clients described it as representing: 'a turning point'; 'a landmark'; and 'a benchmark'. Throughout the five year study, when all clients, participating in the different phases

[80] This represents 40% of the original sample of 50 participants in the study.

of follow-up, were probed about what they meant by ‘useful’, recurrent themes arose. Specifically, guidance was regarded as useful to clients when it:

- provides access to specialist information, including local labour market information, details of courses, training and employment opportunities ;
- provides insights, focus, and clarification;
- motivates (e.g. progress ideas, try something new or explore options);
- increases self-confidence and self-awareness; and/ or
- structures opportunities for reflection and discussion.

These same themes recurred in the fifth and final year of investigation and each is explored in more depth, below, with illustrative quotations from the final year of data collection.

4.2.1 Access to specialist information

The influential Leitch Review[81], was critical of existing guidance provision: ‘a highly fragmented information and advice system, largely removed from the local labour market context, means that people find it difficult to be informed about the opportunities available and their economic value’ (p.116, para 6.58). It stressed the importance of information in the guidance process and states that individuals: ‘need access to good quality, impartial information and advice on local learning opportunities and their relevance in the labour market’ (p.106, para. 6.12). The Review concluded that generally, throughout the entire system of services to support adults in transition, there is a lack of suitable information, fit for purpose, about which it states: ‘This lack of information is a clear market failure…’ (p.107, par 6.14). The new universal careers services that the Review recommends will be responsible for: ‘Careers advice based on local labour market information’ (p.109, para 6.23).

Supporting this view of the importance of high quality, impartial labour market information, clients in this study have consistently indicated how they have valued the specialist knowledge that practitioners bring to guidance, together with their ability to locate further information. The types of information identified by clients included: national, regional and local labour market conditions; current and possible future job vacancies; training and education opportunities; sources of funding; occupational skills requirements; transferable skills; and course requirements. Giving clients

[81] Op cit.

access to these types of information served to expand awareness of existing options, as well as the range of possible education, training and employment opportunities. It also gave them more confidence to move around the labour market. For example, one client successfully completed a course on which he enrolled after his guidance. As a result of this up-skilling, he secured part-time employment. Another client recalls how she was encouraged her to consider alternative career paths:

> *…Its given me the freedom to sort of think…I don't have to sort of stick at this and keep working at it, if I don't want to. I can make another change…when I'm ready to move on. And I think that's the main thing that its given me…is the courage to sort of think, well, you know, I don't have to stick at one - doing this forever.*
>
> [Interview 10]

One other client holds the firm view that his guidance was crucial to his finding employment, after a significant period of unemployment caused by serious ill health. His practitioner encouraged him to change career to fit his changing circumstances and introduced him to a range of suitable employment opportunities:

> *I realise a lot more, if you know what I mean. So, like I said before, getting here [guidance] was really the best thing that ever happened to me.*
>
> [Interview 23]

As a direct consequence, he has been in continuous employment over the period of study in the same sector, has achieved an NVQ Level 3 in his new occupational role and has progressed to the first year of a degree course relevant to his new career.

4.2.2 Insights, focus and clarification

One client, in the second year of a degree course at the time of her case study interview, was both unsure of her next steps and concerned about her lack of a clear career plan. Her guidance helped clarify and focus her ideas so that she was then able to plan her career moves. She was subsequently successful in pursuing her career and progressed within her employing organisation – learning how to 'play the game'.

A quote from another client illustrates how she felt her guidance had clarified the options open to her and given her a clear sense of direction:

> *I think it's useful to be able to talk about what you want to do, because when you're that age, you don't really know what you want to do. But it [guidance]*

kind of points you in the right direction and explains to you what you would have to do…the commitments you have to put in to get where you go. So I think the original interview was helpful.

[Interview 38]

Other examples include one unemployed client who, after his interview, applied successfully for a job. He has remained employed over the intervening years, retrained and developed a clear plan for his future career. A final example relates to a client who presented for guidance after having been made redundant. She felt that the intervention had increased her confidence in her decisions as well as her ability to find employment. By focusing on the jobs available in her area and what she was able to do, she has also remained continuous employment over the past five years.

4.2.3 Motivation

Many adult clients struggling to enter or re-enter the labour market, or progress within it, lack the motivation required to pursue possible career options. The Leitch Review (HM Treasury, 2006[82]) emphasises the link between motivation and career progression: 'For people to consider improving their skills, they need to be award of and motivated by the benefits of doing so. They must see a link between skills development and achieving their own personal ambitions, such as improving their career…' (p.106, para.6.12). Evidence from this longitudinal study illuminates the role that guidance can play in motivating adults in transition.

In the report from the first follow-up study from the research (2005[83]), results were presented from an analysis of the relationship between agreed action plans and the extent to which they had been implemented. Twenty-five of the 29 clients (86%) that were followed-up in the final year of the study had agreed action plans with the practitioner during the initial case study interview. An accurate examination of the relationship between action plans agreed and the development of career trajectories over the 5 years of the study has proved impossible, since clients' recollections of the action they agreed with practitioners has been vague (see Section 5.1). This, of course, raises a question around the role of action plans in guidance interviews, since their primary purpose is to provide clients with a clear and concrete framework for progression. Neverteless, clients have persistently reported that, despite their inability to make connections between these action plans and the ways their careers

[82] Op cit.
[83] Op cit.

have developed, the guidance had been successful in providing the momentum and direction to move them forward. Some recognised that, as a direct result consequence, they are now generally more positive and forward looking. To illustrate this particular aspect of 'useful' guidance, one client (typified by an 'opportunistic' approach to career decision making, see section 3, above), who is aware that he does not have a plan to progress his career, still feels that the guidance he received gave him the motivation to continue with his search for a suitable job. When probed about his guidance interview, he had only a vague recollection – yet still had a strong sense of its influence on his career trajectory over the past five years:

> *…the main thing was just motivation to just to keep on trying really I suppose… …but I suppose it…has been really influential… …I am aware I need to do more planning… …it [the guidance interview] is in the back of my mind somewhere…it helped… …it's hard to say. I had a drive to do in the first place and the interview was… my way of enforcing how I believed about the learning… …the interview inspired me to do more stuff.*
>
> [Interview 22]

Another example of how guidance motivates relates to a client aspiring to become a nurse. She had being struggling with a number of difficulties in her personal life, as a result of which she had developed a negative perception about her chances of realising this ambition. Reflecting upon the influence of her guidance, she said:

> *Everything had gone wrong in my life, or was going wrong… …after the interview I think…I certainly see my life more positively. And I think if that happened again…I'd try and start from where I was, you know what I mean? Instead of going down, I'd think, "Well, No! There are people out there to help"… …Oh I still think [the guidance] has been positive…it made me start…thinking about what I actually wanted to do again. So instead of sitting…thinking, "Oh this has happened, what should I do?", or "Just go out and get the first job!"… …it made me think.*
>
> [Interview 24]

Over the five years, this client has made progress towards achieving her long term aspiration and is generally more positive in her outlook.

A final example relates to a client who felt that the guidance had been pivotal in motivating her to pursue her 'dream':

It…was useful. The whole process that I went through round about that time was really useful… …It wasn't just the one thing…the whole process – the aptitude test, which…the lady at that interview actually recommended, and got me on that trail…so that whole process was…what really, really started it going. Because if I remember the chain of events right, she recommended I do the aptitude test…and you know, basically encouraged me to go for it. And so from that, the aptitude test told me that I was capable of doing it. And that kind of gave me the confidence to, you know, to chase the dream, rather than try to fall back into something that I'd done before.

[Interview 40]

The guidance had motivated her to find the right education courses necessary to re-skill and had supported her plans to set up her own business.

4.2.4 Self-confidence and self-awareness

Over the period of the study, many clients have reflected on how they have changed. For some, this relates to improved self-confidence. For others, it relates to an improved understanding of their skills, abilities and preferences.

An example of improved self-confidence relates to one client who felt that his guidance had given him the necessary confidence to approach his line manager with a request for training and subsequently pursue his career goal. This request was granted and led to a promotion to a different occupational role within the same company:

I do remember being quite optimistic afterwards [the initial guidance interview] and thinking: "Yeah, this is quite a good thing". And again it was nice to know it was there…

[Interview 1]

As a result of an organisational re-structuring, this client subsequently accepted a redundancy package from the company, completed a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) course and moved abroad to become a teacher. Five years on, he has now returned to the UK to start a degree course. He had actually attended his case study interview to enquire about undertaking a higher education course. Now, it appears that he has come full circle:

I kind of realised that I was turning (his age) in 2007…and…that I couldn't really carry on teaching as a profession. Mainly because it wasn't something I

wanted to do and also…I thought…I need to get something a bit more solid. So I…thought of doing a degree. Obviously, when I came to [guidance organisation], back in whenever it was…I still had the idea then of a degree…things obviously changed a bit. But still I…realised that not having a degree was kind of a hindrance, if I wanted to do something a bit more constructive…with my career.

[Interview 1]

Another client, who had a strong recollection of her guidance five years after the event, felt it continued to exert a significant influence on her improved self-confidence:

And all the things that I thought about myself came out in the interview… it just sort of assured me…it wasn't a case of somebody said, "Oh no, you should be an accountant!"…The jobs that I was…looking for…were the jobs that I should be…looking forward to, with prospects in mind…I still…look back on it [guidance interview] as my turning point - of realising that what I was doing, I should be doing…

[Interview 5]

She has progressed well, receiving promotions and significant pay rises over the 5 years of the study. Although her immediate plans are to start a family, she is confident that her plans are achievable in the future, attributing this to the guidance she received:

An example of increased self-awareness relates to a client who found that her guidance had helped her gain work experience, which, in turn, had helped her towards a clearer understanding of her skills and abilities. As a result, she had applied for a particular job:

Well, I wouldn't have got the [company] job without doing the work experience… …I think I'm a bit more confident about job opportunities now.

[Interview 7]

Two other clients similarly recalled their guidance as providing a valuable opportunity to increase their self-awareness.

4.2.5 Structured opportunities for reflection

One aspect of guidance, often under-estimated and over-looked, is the way in which an intervention can give an adult a safe space in which to reflect on their current circumstances and possible futures with an impartial professional. As noted above, a 'unique selling point' for formal guidance could, therefore, be the reassurance afforded by impartial, independent professional support. This attribute of guidance, as described by a number of clients, has exact parallels with the 'unconditional positive regard' many proponents of helping approaches with adults advocate[84]. Like many of the other 'softer' outcomes of guidance valued by clients, described above, this outcome of guidance is not measurable using quantifiable methodologies. Nevertheless, it remains a memorable and valued feature of guidance for many clients.

This finding may help to explain why some clients initially reported their guidance as 'useful' and subsequently changed their minds. Whilst the memory of the guidance interview is vivid, the rapport building skills of practitioners are valued because clients 'felt good' immediately after the interveiw. Later, when the memory of this fades and clients begin to recognise that the value of other features of the guidance interview was rather limited, their evaluation of the guidance as 'useful' also changes.

All of these five examples of 'useful' guidance have resulted in positive, but arguably subjective changes in the client. These 'soft' outcomes of guidance are difficult to measure and the analysis in this study has been based on clients' perceptions and their willingness to talk about them, rather than by means that would lend themselves to measurement using quantitative methods. This emphases an urgent need to develop methodologies for the assessment and measurement of impact that accommodates 'soft' as well as 'hard' outcomes.

4.3 Limitations of guidance

As discussed in Section 5.2 below, four of the 29 clients successfully contacted during the final year of this study continued to face significant barriers, which were impeding their progression into, and through, the labour market. Specifically, these barriers resulted from persistent and chronic ill health, aging and local labour market

[84] For example: Egan, G. (2001). *The Skilled Helper: A Problem-Management Approach to Helping* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks Cole.; Rogers, C. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology,* 21(1), 95-103.

demand. Two of these clients felt that, the guidance they received had little, or no, influence on their situations over the last five years. For clients like these, who are facing serious structural barriers to their career progression, a one-off guidance intervention is unlikely to have any impact on their situation. Longer-term interventions would be required to make a difference[85]. The remaining two clients, who were facing barriers, felt that there had been some useful elements of their guidance, such as being given support and contact details of local employers.

Four other clients, not suffering from these types of barriers, also reported the limitations of guidance. For two, financial constraints meant that they were not been able to follow their aspirations for a more creative role or retrain to change careers. Both the third and fourth, with opportunistic styles of career decision making, felt their guidance had little impact – possibly because of their strong personal preferences to keep options open and avoid planning.

Overall, six clients, therefore, felt their guidance had little, or no, impact on their progression. For these individuals, guidance could not help them because the barriers they faced were too great, or their uncertainty and/or values made them hard to help. So what can guidance reasonably be expected to achieve?

4.4 What should guidance do?

Together with exploring clients' perceptions of 'useful' guidance and its influences on their trajectories over the last five years, clients were also asked to comment on what they thought guidance should do, in light of their experiences over the past five years. Twenty-three of the 29 clients (79%) were able to indicate how it could have helped them further. Answers ranged from providing more information, to being more directive or providing more opportunities for follow-up. Further analysis revealed distinct differences amongst clients with different career decision making styles (see Section 3, above).

Evaluative career decision makers reflected upon the guidance they had received and what it should do in terms of both their practical and emotional needs. One client felt the guidance she received was encouraging, supportive and helpful – and that

[85] See, for example, Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., Brown, A., Hasluck, C., & Behle, H. (2007). *Skills Diagnostics and Screening Tools: A Literature Review* (No. 459, research report). Leeds: Department for Work and Pensions/Corporate Document Services. Retrieved 4 December 2008, from http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep459.pdf.

this is precisely what it should do. Yet another stressed the limitations of an approach that marginalises emotions and ignores context:

> *I think it was a quite brief encounter, really. I mean, you do the test, you have a one-off interview, and that's it. And I also think a further discussion on finding out what the person is like, you know, in…your brain gets analysed, but it doesn't tell you whether that person is…it doesn't tell you everything about someone. And I'm very motivated by feelings and kind of big issues, you know, that's how I get motivated…*
>
> [Interview 29]

The responses of aspirational career decision makers tended to relate to the longer term career aspiration. One understood that, to achieve her aspiration, she needed to re-skill. Since she worked during the day, she wanted guidance to provide more information on education courses that were suited to those in full-time employment. Another felt he needed financial resources to pursue his ideal job – recognising that this was impossible for guidance to deliver

For the strategic career decision makers, guidance should be objective and deliver high quality information. Three felt that their guidance had delivered on expectations. One suggested that guidance should be more heavily promoted. Others thought that guidance should: provide information on transferable skills; advise and help with job moves; provide advice on application processes; provide support with their curriculum vitae; help with job interviews and selection panels. Interestingly, one highlighted the value of her guidance having identified a broad range of opportunities, which she was then able to assess for relevance.

Finally, the group of opportunistic career decision makers offered the greatest challenge for guidance. They are typically averse to planning, preferring to keep options open. Whilst three felt that guidance had delivered exactly what they wanted, four felt that guidance should be more ‘directive’ or ‘targeted’, helping to give them the direction they felt they desperately needed (but did not want), as well as providing particular information on courses/jobs. One other felt that guidance should provide an opportunity to talk to a professional – which is what she had valued most in the guidance she had received.

For those clients dealing with significant barriers to entering or progressing in the labour market, identifying what guidance should do was a difficult question. Two of

the four clients with barriers, believed that guidance should be more than a one off intervention, that there should be more opportunities for follow-up. It was felt that guidance needed to be more supportive and play more of an advocacy role.

This section has reviewed research evidence from this study on the effectiveness, or 'usefulness' of guidance from the perspective of the consumer, together with the limitations of guidance, for some clients. It has also explored clients' perceptions of what guidance should deliver. The next section examines data on various aspects of adult careers guidance provision, again from the perspective of uses of the service.

5. Careers guidance for adults

Data analysis has provided many insights to aspects of career guidance provision for adults. This section draws some of these threads together by reviewing the role of action plans in longer term career development, re-visiting barriers that have proved insurmountable to the career progression of some individuals, considering the development of career management competencies, exploring whether clients feel that they have a 'career' and finally scrutinising what further guidance they would like to have available.

5.1 Action plans and action

The new adult career service is to be available through 'different channels' using 'a range of tools', which will: 'help people assess their skills and abilities against their career aspirations, identify their opportunities and choices, and develop a personal action plan.' (DIUS, 2008, p.6[86]). Given the role that personal action plans are being given in the operation of the new service, it is relevant to scrutinise data collected from this study to establish what role they have played in personal advancement and career progression. Over the five years of this study, the subject of plans for the future has been explored with clients. This section presents the results from an analysis of these data.

In the final three years of the study, clients' recollection of their action plans grew vague, so analysis was focused on plans that they were actively pursuing[87]. Of the 29 clients participating in all of the five years of this study, the majority (86%, n=25) had agreed action plans with practitioners during their initial case study interview. Two years after the case study interview, 52% (n=15) of the clients who participated throughout were proactively pursuing plans. Three years on, this proportion had increased to 66% (n=19). By the fourth and final year, this percentage had fallen again to 41% (n=12). This variation in the numbers of clients pursuing action over time can be accounted for by changes in their circumstances, over the five year period. For example, a training course may have been agreed at the guidance interview, but the start of that course may have been delayed for various reasons – such as an individual's decision to travel abroad. Others received further guidance in

[86] Op cit.
[87] Plans that are actively being pursued may, or may not, relate to action plans agreed in the case study interviews.

the years after their case study interview in which action plans were revised and followed through. Personal action plans agreed with practitioners during the case study interview included:

- pursuit of a training course (e.g. in Further Education);
- completion of an accredited qualification;
- organisation of an element of education or training (e.g. placement abroad);
- search for further job opportunities or work placements;
- investigation of job opportunities abroad;
- periods of travel (for work or pleasure); and
- establishing, or expanding, their own business.

In the final year of the study, the plans that clients were actively pursuing were compared to the action plans agreed during the case study guidance interview. Of the 12 clients engaged in action during the final year of the study, only four were related to their case study action plans. The first, who agreed to explore Higher Education courses and Access courses, was enrolled on a higher education degree course. The second client had undertaken voluntary work in different industries as part of her agreed action and was enrolled on a nursing course with plans to enter care of the elderly (a decision based on her voluntary work experience). A third client had, as part of his agreed action, undertaken work placements to confirm his career ideas for a change and was retraining for a new career as a physiotherapist. The fourth client was pursuing a career as a carer after working with a placement officer to explore his career options – agreed action from his guidance. Although it could be argued that action plans seem to have had a positive influence on these clients, other additional factors may have influenced these outcomes, so causality cannot be attributed.

For a further five of the 12 clients actively pursuing plans, new skills had been learned almost as a by-product. So although action plans were not been directly implemented, clients were able to identify positive benefits that had accrued from associated activities, pursued as a consequence of guidance. For example, one client had not researched Access courses, as agreed, but had negotiated further training with his employer, because he had realised just how dissatisfied he was with his current position.

Action pursued by the remaining three clients was completely unrelated to the action plans agreed in the case study interviews.

Of the remaining 17 clients, 14 (48%) were not engaged in any career-related action either because they were currently satisfied with their current position or were busy gaining experience relevant to their future. The remaining three clients (10%) are those who felt they were faced by insurmountable barriers, so felt 'stuck'.

The issue of client ownership of action plans that emerge from guidance interventions merits further investigation. Guidance is a learning process, which means that individuals must somehow feel connected and motivated to take action on their own accord. Traditional guidance practice has often tended to focus on the practitioner co-developing and/ or administering at least some aspects of the 'action plan' on behalf of the client. These research findings show that the clients have differing learning and decision-making styles. Different practices are therefore required to ensure that the client is sufficiently empowered to implement his/ her action plan.

5.2 Barriers and constraints

Twenty-three clients (79%) of the 29 in the final sample talked about various constraints on their career progression, including what might influence, or need to be considered in the future. These ranged from: ill-health; financial responsibilities; caring commitments; lack of self-confidence in skills and abilities; lack of opportunities; lack of courage to take risks and make changes; time-management; and poor motivation. Approaches to dealing with these constraints seem to be central to career decision making styles. For example, a strategic decision maker is more likely to develop a rational plan to overcome an obstacle than an opportunistic or aspirational decision maker (see Section 3, above).

Of the 29 remaining participants in the study after five years, four talked about major barriers and constraints to their progression. These included circumstances which they saw as beyond their control, such as chronic ill health, age and local labour market conditions. Those experiencing these types of constraints have become, or remained, disengaged from the labour market over the last five years. Two have not been able to get jobs at all during the five years of the study, but have participated in education and training courses and/or voluntary work. One other client has found

part-time employment, in which he is unable to use his expertise or attract a salary comparable to the one he had before redundancy. He now feels overqualified and is convinced that the combination of his age, high level qualifications, care commitments and local labour market conditions mean that his chances of future gainful employment are unlikely. This is beginning to impact on both his mental and physical well-being.

5.3 Learning and development

Learning and development are inextricably intertwined with career decisions, progression and personal change. When clients were asked to reflect upon their learning and development over the last five years, the majority talked about informal learning, gained through life experiences (76%, n=22). One reflected:

> *Ooh, yeah, well, I'm getting old, aren't I?... …I think you become more realistic, and more pragmatic, you know… …I'm trying to run a business and people think I'm an expert in this that and the other. And I'm not really, you know, I'm just learning as I go along, you know. [Laughs] I haven't a clue, really, about it, and I look at the spreadsheets, and stuff, and I think, "Oh Christ!"*
>
> [Interview 49]

Others recognised the potential for transferring informal learning to their current employing situation:

> *I've worked in different places, but they've all had different ways of working...I think I benefit from that, because I've seen, you know, a company trying to build up too fast and I've seen a company where, you know, managers walk round ordering people…I've done them all and they're all very interesting, but they're all very different…I think everything has their flaws and once you've seen it – when you see another company like [current company] trying to do things…you start saying, well: "Whoa, whoa, whoa - I've seen that before and it's not good!."*
>
> [Interview 5]

For others, learning from their mistakes has been equally valuable. The majority also believed that they had gained new job-related skills over the last year (72%, n=21). These ranged from job related skills and knowledge (such as IT and technical skills, customer relations, communication, networking, working on own initiative and organisational skills) to those derived from recreational activities (such as painting,

play-writing and speaking a foreign language). All were positive about their skill development, recognising its value. For instance, one client reported that over the last five years she has learnt how to use a computer:

> *I think I would…say that it's been a very, very good change…I never thought I would be able to do anything with computers. And I'm still not wonderful! But you know, I can feel comfortable, and confident, to sit down and go: "Right, okay!". It's like it's taken a fear away…*
>
> [Interview 2]

The development of career management competencies has been an integral part of clients' learning and development over the last five years. Some clients felt that these were developed as part of the guidance they received as part of their initial case study interview. For others, they have been acquired by exploring employment and training opportunities, or through talking to family, friends and colleagues. Examples given by clients include how they had developed their career competencies linked to: researching training and employment opportunities (38%, n=11); understanding of the labour market and how it operates (66%, n=19); and knowledge of employer requirements (41%, n=12).

5.4 Clients' perception of 'career'

Boundaries between work, employment, unemployment and leisure have shifted over the past half century, with further changes in prospect[88]. The fluidity of these boundaries is exacerbated by capital, people and jobs becoming increasingly mobile, with a single global market now existing that has an impact on everyone. Trends in globalization and technological developments have transformed how work is done and where it is undertaken, with improvements in communication re-shaping what it means to be 'at work' (Friedman, 2007[89]). Two decades ago, these changes were thought to be heralding the demise of the traditional, bureaucratic, organisational career in favour of more temporary, fluid employment patterns. No longer would individuals be able to look forward to a career for life.

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[88] Wilson, R. A. (2008). The Future of Work: What does work mean 2025 and beyond? *Beyond Current Horizons*. Retrieved 13 November 2008, from http://www.beyondcurrenthorizons.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bch_challenge_paper_work_wilson.pdf.

[89] Friedman, T. (2007). *The World is Flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giraux.

However, these grand visions have not quite been realised. For example, 94.1% of working men and 91.6% of women were in permanent jobs at the turn of the century. Of these, 95.2% of men and 73.3% of women worked full-time:

> *One job per person has stayed the norm – permanent full-time employment remains dominant, workers are not moving more often from one employer to another and the 'career' – as a way of viewing work – has triumphed.*
>
> (Moynagh & Worsley, 2005, p.93[90])

More than this, between 1985 and 2001, the proportion of employees seeing themselves as having a career increased, rather than decreased, from just under half to 60%. The biggest increase (from 14% to 34%) was amongst low-paid groups, like bus and coach drivers, packers and cleaners. This trend also extended to young people, with research evidence revealing how young people also 'appeared firmly wedded to careers'[91].

Over the final two years of the study (2006/07 and 2007/08), clients were asked whether they thought they had a 'career'. Three of the four clients who were not in employment because they were facing barriers (see Section 5.2, above), were not asked in either year if they thought they had a career - since their particular circumstances made this an inappropriate line of questioning. The fourth client facing barriers to employment had actually managed to secure a part-time job, in which he considered he was under-employed. Nevertheless, he was asked the question. Evidence relating to perceptions of whether they felt they had a career was, therefore, gathered from 26 of the 29 clients who completed the study.

In 2006/07, seven clients of the 26 asked the question (27%) believed that they did have a career. All were in some type of employment. Ten (39%) felt they did not yet have a career. Two (8%) were unsure as to whether they had a career and seven (27%) did not think they had a career.

In the final year of the study (2007/08), the proportion of clients feeling that they did have a career had increased to half of the sample (50%, n=13). Of these, one had a career but did not want one (because he wanted to do something creative, rather than the administrative job in which he was employed). Thirty one per cent (n=8) felt

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[90] Moynagh, M., & Worsley, R. (2005). *Working in the Twenty-first Century.* Leeds: ESRC Future of Work Programme and King's Lynn: The Tomorrow Project.
[91] Moynagh & Worsley (2005), p.96, Op cit.

that they did not have a career yet, but it was something they were working towards. Twelve per cent (n=3) were unsure whether they had a career - they would like one, but this would require changing jobs or retraining. Only two clients in the final year of the study did not believe they had a career. One of these was in full-time employment which he regarded 'just as a job', rather than a career. The other was 'still a student'.

Clients' perceptions of what career means remained largely unchanged over the five year period of the study. For one client having a career meant having 'an aim and a focus' and 'being valued'. However, for the majority, it was described as a requirement for higher level qualifications; reasonable experience in the field; a higher status in the organisation; the ability to progress; and achieving a position of authority.

5.5 Further guidance

In terms of guidance support required for future progression, evidence from the study indicates that clients seek advice and guidance from a range of sources, including: professional guidance practitioners, family and friends, colleagues, mentors and tutors. Whilst a high proportion of clients (90%, n=26) had received advice and help from informal sources, only 38% of clients (n=11) had received further guidance and/ or professional help from formal sources. One reported that they no longer knew where to access help as her local careers office had shut.

When asked whether they would seek guidance in the future, the majority of clients indicated that they would seek guidance from a professional in the future (72%, n=21). For example:

> *Yeah basically, I definitely would …I'm fully intending to go back and use these resources, because they're there and they're very, very good resources so I definitely would … I would probably go and use any careers guidance…*
>
> [Interview 1]

A further analysis of the responses revealed that clients wanted further guidance support with:

- further training and education opportunities;
- sources of funding;
- job applications, curriculum vitae and interview techniques;

- job prospects and future regional needs;
- further skills assessment;
- requirements for jobs abroad;
- relocating; and
- maternity rights and pay issues.

This indicates a clear need for professional guidance, with the list of topics requiring specialist knowledge, information and skills.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, data analysis revealed a relationship between the career decision making style espoused by an individual and their predisposition to plan their career progression some way into the future. Of the 29 clients in the final year of study, 52% (n=15) felt they had a longer term career direction, with 48% (n=14) unsure, both about direction and next steps. Opportunistic career decision makers were least likely to have future plans (three of the nine) with strategic career decision makers being most likely (all seven).

The primary focus of this longitudinal research was to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance. The next section presents further evidence on the assessment and measurement of impact drawn from a broader range of research evidence.

6. What is effective guidance?

The question: 'what is effective guidance?' throws into sharp focus the nature of the impact of services. Measurement of impact essentially refers to a research and evaluative process designed to provide credible information that strengthens and legitimises guidance services. The need for further work in this area was one of the major issues that emerged from the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review (OECD, 2004[92]) as well as a related review conducted for the European Commission (Sultana, 2003a[93]). Additionally, it has been noted that most policy-makers rely on a very limited evidence base when evaluating the inputs, processes and outputs of career guidance services (Sultana, 2003b[94]).

The original brief for this research study was to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance in England over a five year period, from the perspective of the client receiving the guidance. Evaluating the effectiveness of guidance services is both complex and difficult (Bimrose et al., 2004[95]). Defining precisely what was to be evaluated; measuring this appropriately and determining from whose perspective effectiveness were key challenges for the research design. The particular problems with an approach that gives primacy to the views of clients of guidance services, as this study does, need to be acknowledged. For example, whilst some benefits of effective guidance are immediate and recognisable (for example, entry to an educational course) others are likely to accrue over an extended time period. It is not unusual for clients to recognise, only with the benefit of hindsight over a number of years, that guidance contributed positively to their personal and career development. Also, the extent to which beneficiaries of guidance are able to distinguish and recognise the value of an effective guidance intervention in enhancing their educational progress is likely to be problematic, since clients may reasonably be expected to place more value on the learning or employment that may follow from guidance than on the guidance itself. Additionally, a positive outcome from a guidance intervention might be facilitating a client's acceptance that aspirations are

[92] OECD. (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/45/34050171.pdf.
[93] Sultana, R. G. (2003a). *Review of Careers Guidance Policies in 11 Acceding Countries and Candidate Countries. Synthesis Report.* Turin: European Training Foundation.
[94] Sultana, R. G. (2003b). *Guidance Policies in the Knowledge Society: trends, challenges and responses across Europe. A Synthesis Report*. Thessaloniki, Greece: Cedefop.
[95] Op cit.

unrealistic. This could be (and often is) regarded negatively by clients, even though retrospectively its value may be recognised.

However, the longitudinal nature of this study has enabled data to be captured over an extended timeframe of five years and so highlights the way in which evaluations of guidance impact are prone to change over time, with the benefit of hindsight. Some of the issues relevant to evaluating impact, relevant to the context of this study, will be examined next.

6.1 Measures for evaluating guidance

As noted in the first report from this study (Bimrose et al., 2004[96]), models that have been developed specifically to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance are limited in number, with Sampson, Reardon, Peterson and Lenz (2004[97]) suggesting that the apparent lack of progress in the development of useful accountability and evaluation models is linked to 'the absence of conceptual and operational constructs that define the outputs of career service interventions.' However, despite difficulties, different models have been applied to the planning, management and delivery of guidance services (Bimrose, et al., 2004[98]; Bimrose, Hughes & Collin, 2006[99]). These include approaches that seek to: standardise the process of organisational self-assessment[100]; measure the effectiveness of guidance based upon 'ideal input' factors (Mayston, 2002[101]); gather evidence to demonstrate accountability (Sampson et al., 2004[102]); distinguish between the various input, process and outcome factors involved in the delivery of guidance (den Boer, Mittendorf, Scheerens & Sjebnitzer,

[96] Op cit.
[97] Sampson, J. P., Reardon, R. C., Peterson, G. W., & Lenz, J. G. (2004). *Career Counseling and Services: A Cognitive Information Processing Approach.* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
[98] Op cit.
[99] Bimrose, J., Hughes, D., & Colin, A. (2006). *Quality Assurance Mechanisms for Information, Advice and Guidance: A Critical Review.* Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2008/qacr.pdf.
[100] The EFQM Excellence Model is said to be the most widely used framework for organisational self-assessment in Europe and has become the basis for the majority of national and regional Quality Awards. For further details, go to: http://www.guidance-research.org/EG/ip/theory/tp/efqm.
[101] Mayston, D. (2002). *Assessing the Benefits of Guidance (CeGS Occasional Paper).* Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www.derby.ac.uk/cegs/publications/CareerGuidancePaper.pdf.
[102] Op cit.

2005[103]); and apply a tri-variable model of quality assurance to guidance (Evangelista, 2003[104]).

Although these approaches differ in the detail of their content and application, emergent themes indicate that the evaluation of guidance is commonly conceptualised in terms of inputs, processes and outcomes. In this context, *inputs* include a number of features related to the context in which guidance is delivered. For example: the number and characteristics of service users; the number of sessions per user; the qualifications of staff delivering the service; and the infrastructure of the organisation delivering guidance services (that is, accommodation, time and other resources). *Processes* broadly relate to the delivery of different aspects of services, like: the types of services provided (that is, information giving, advice, counselling, in-depth assessment); methods used (e.g. telephone, face-to-face, group work, online); systems supporting service delivery (including promptness of responses to enquiries and appointment lead-times); and overall management of the service. Finally, *outcomes* focus on the benefits of guidance to the individual recipients of services (for example, client satisfaction, the acquisition of decision making and/or career management skills and numbers of clients progressing into employment, education or training). Yet other terms, such as '*outputs*' and '*throughputs*', are also evident. For example, '*output*' has been used to refer to the number of client action plans produced as a result of a given level of intervention(s) and '*throughput*' to the number of clients using the service at any given time (Watts & Dent, 2006[105]).

The inconsistency in concepts and language used within the UK is also evident across national boundaries. Recent European research found:

> *Key words such as 'outputs' and 'outcomes' (not to mention the distinctions between 'information', 'advice' and 'guidance') have different meanings in different national contexts (e.g. in some contexts the distinction is made between process factors in the guidance interview, while in others the focus is*

[103] den Boer, P., Mittendorf, K., Scheerens, J., & Sjenitzer, T. (2005). *Indicators and Benchmarks for Lifelong Guidance.* Thessaloniki: Cedefop.
[104] Evangelista, L. (2003). Quality assurance in guidance services – a tri-variable model. *Professionalità Journal*, 78. Italy: Editrice la Scula. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://ww.orientamento.it/orientamento/tri-varibale.pdf.
[105] Watts, A. G., & Dent, G. (2006). 'The 'P' word: productivity in the delivery of career guidance services. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 34(2), 177-189.

purely on throughputs that are measurable in quantitative terms – such as placement in jobs or in training). (Sultana, 2005, p.2[106])

There is, therefore, an urgent need for a common terminology of activities and concepts relevant to the evaluation of guidance that would permit comparative evaluations of services within and between countries.

6.2 Evaluating effective guidance

With the lack of clarity that currently surrounds the study of impact, the evaluation of effective guidance is multi-faceted and complex. A wide range of factors potentially influence individual career choice and decision making. It should also be remembered that guidance is frequently not a discrete input. Rather, it is typically embedded in other contexts (such as learning provision, employer/employee relationships and/ or within multi-strand initiatives). Yet another complexity relates to the comparison of different studies, since the precise nature of different guidance interventions often varies (for example, whether the guidance is delivered on an individual or group basis; the model informing the approach adopted by the practitioner; the characteristics of the client group to whom the service is being delivered; and resources available). Any attempt to 'quality assure' the efficacy of guidance requires, therefore, a clear sense of: what is to be measured; for what purpose; who is the audience; what systems or procedures are in place for collecting and collating relevant data; and what management/ quality assurance arrangements exist to ensure that data are acted upon in order to effect change.

Sultana (2005[107]) highlights difficulties inherent in isolating guidance interventions for the purposes of establishing causal relationships (for example, between guidance provision and 'drop-out' rates). It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that an agreed set of outcome measures for guidance, or even common methods of collecting data, do not currently exist, except, perhaps, in a limited number of discrete programmes or areas of work.

However, the increased political profile for adult guidance in England brings with it an increased emphasis on accountability and quality assurance. At the time of writing,

[106] Sultana, R. G. (2005). *Indicators and Benchmarks in Guidance: Summary report on the conclusions of the mutual learning activity (consultation meeting).* Cedefop/Bundesagentur für Arbeit.
[107] Op cit.

there are two main formal external quality assurance mechanisms: the 'matrix' standard and the Ofsted inspectorate. The first of these, the 'matrix' standard is 'a quality framework for the effective delivery of information, advice and guidance'[108]. It is made up of eight elements, four of which cover the delivery of information, advice and guidance services[109] and four of which relate to the management of services[110]. Whilst an organisation called 'ENTO'[111] operates as the guardian of the matrix standard and sets standards, another organisation, EMQC[112], is responsible, operationally, for the assessment and accreditation of organisations to the 'matrix' standards. Organisations delivering guidance services must take the initiative to contact EMQC to organise, and pay for, the accreditation process. The second quality assurance mechanism is the Ofsted inspectorate. In 2007, Ofsted took over the main responsibilities of ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate), including the inspection of adult guidance services. Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who 'have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. However, the Common Inspection Framework is currently being re-written, with the proposals for a revised Common Inspection Framework and for the inspection of colleges, work-based learning and nextstep from September 2009. This is set out in a consultation document, available from the Ofsted website[113]. The emphasis of this new inspection framework will be on the service users: 'We have reviewed arrangements for the inspection of the FE and skills system to ensure that they are coherent and well matched to the needs of the user and the quality of the service, and that they develop our ability to target inspection where it will make the most difference'. During the implementation of the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service, pilots have been informed that they will be subjected to full inspection during the period September 2009 to March 2010. This includes publicly funded providers of guidance.

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[108] About the matrix Standard, [Online]. Available: http://www.matrix-quality-standard.com.

[109] These are: People are made aware of the service and how to engage with it; People's use of the service is defined and understood; People are provided with access to information and support in using it; People are supported in exploring options and making choices.

[110] These are: Service delivery is planned and maintained; Staff competence and support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service; Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained; Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring, evaluation and action.

[111] Information about ENTO can be accessed at: http://www.ento.co.uk/.

[112] Information about East Midlands Quality Centre (EMQC) can be accessed at: http://www.emqc.co.uk/.

[113] http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Consultations/A-focus-on-improvement-proposals-for-further-education-and-skills-system-inspections-from-September-2009.

Both of these two formal mechanisms focus on the inputs, processes and quantitative outcomes of the guidance process. Both reflect the difficulties inherent in capturing data from the perspectives of different stakeholders in the guidance process. This is considered next.

6.3 From whose perspective?

As previously discussed, the types of evidence required on the effectiveness of guidance are likely to vary for different stakeholders, for different organisations, at different times (Bimrose et al., 2004[114]; Bimrose, Hughes & Collin, 2006[115]). For example, individual consumers of services are likely to be most concerned with having access to high quality support to assist them with labour market transitions (e.g. was the service accessible and useful?). In contrast, managers are often concerned more with productivity issues (i.e. which elements of the service contributed most efficiently to the outcomes achieved and how can these be best managed to contribute towards improvement?). Practitioners delivering services will be interested in their own job satisfaction, career development and maintaining a high level of professional integrity (e.g. providing an impartial service), whilst policy-makers usually reflect the priorities of the government of the day (for example, social integration, improving economic competitiveness) and emphasise cost-benefit outcomes (i.e. did the service achieve the expected outcomes and what are the cost implications for current and future provision?). Finally, employers in different occupational sectors (who, it can be argued, are the ultimate beneficiaries of guidance services) are most likely to stress the importance of appropriate placement referrals (i.e. did the service provide an effective service in terms of signposting or supplying the 'right sort' of people for the company?).

One key challenge for the broad community of guidance is, therefore, to develop differing types of evidence that address the requirements of quality assurance mechanisms for services and satisfy the needs of different stakeholders. Important though inputs and processes are, in quality assurance terms, it is the 'end product' that is most critical from the point of view of the customer/client. That is, has the intervention made a positive and meaningful difference to the client or customer? A helpful distinction between different levels of impact outcomes for the individual

[114] Op cit.
[115] Op cit.

recipient of services has been highlighted (Hughes et al., 2002[116]) and is detailed in the first report from this study (Bimrose et al., 2004[117]). In summary, these are: immediate outcomes (e.g. enhanced knowledge and skills, attitudinal and motivational changes); intermediate outcomes (e.g. improved job search skills); longer-term outcomes for the individual (e.g. progression into training, education/work); and longer-term outcomes for the economy (e.g. increased productivity, reduced periods of unemployment).

Despite all of the complexities associated with evaluating the effectiveness of guidance, there is a growing body of evidence to support a claim for its positive effects (Pollard, et al., 2007[118]; Tyers & Sinclair, 2005[119]; Watts & Sultana, 2004[120]). As noted earlier, much of this evidence, however, comes from quantitative studies and much from North America, with a need identified for research to be undertaken in the UK context (Hughes et al., 2002[121]). The volume of existing evidence from quantitative research has indeed been complemented and extended by the deep and rich insights provided by the findings from this longitudinal qualitative research, with its special focus on the perspective of consumers of guidance services, over a five year period.

6.4 Contemporary debates relevant to evaluating effectiveness

Section 3.2, above, discusses the dominance of the matching paradigm (derived from differential psychology). Its originator (Parsons, 1909[122]) 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 significant and continuing influence of this

[116] Op cit.
[117] Op cit.
[118] Op cit.
[119] Tyers, C., & Sinclair, A. (2005). *Intermediate Impacts of Advice and Guidance.* Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR638.pdf.
[120] Watts, A. G., & Sultana, R. G. (2004). Career Guidance Policies in 37 Countries: Contrasts and Common Themes. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 4(2/3), 105-122.
[121] Op cit.
[122] Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

approach on the practice of careers guidance was noted by Krumboltz (1994[123]) who suggested that most current practice was 'still governed by the three-part theory outlined by Frank Parsons (1909)' (p.14). Savickas (1997[124]) concurred: 'Parson's paradigm for guiding occupational choice remains to this day the most widely used approach to career counselling' (p.150). Findings from this longitudinal study into effective guidance are consistent with these views, indicating that career practitioners in England are still heavily reliant on this particular approach (Bimrose, et al., 2004[125]; Bimrose & Barnes, 2006[126]).

However, the theory contains serious flaws (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996[127]; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996[128]; Sharf, 1997[129]). One is that the approach is based on an essentially rational model of human behaviour, in which it is assumed that individuals are predisposed to making rational decisions based on objective, scientific facts. The extent to which this is always true is highly questionable. Another weakness is that it ignores context – with little attention paid to the barriers to employment that exist associated with, for example, gender, ethnic origin, social class or disability. As a result of these and other criticisms of the 'matching' approach to guidance, alternative approaches have been developed to inform practice. One of these are constructivist approaches (Savickas, 1993[130]; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996[131]; Reid, 2006[132]). In practice, this involves guidance practitioners making systematic use of client career narratives. Constructivist approaches assume that all individuals construct, and thereby perpetuate social realities, which remain independent of

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[123] Krumboltz, J. D. (1994). Improving career development theory from a social learning perspective. In M. L. Savickas & R. L. Lent (Eds.), *Convergence in Career Development Theories* (pp. 9-31). Palo Alto, California: CPP Books.

[124] Savickas, M. L. (1997). Constructivist career counseling: models and methods. *Advances in Personal Construct Psychology,* 4(2), 149-182.

[125] Op cit.

[126] Bimrose, J., & Barnes, S.-A. (2006). Is career guidance effective? Evidence from a longitudinal study in England. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 15(2), 19-25.

[127] Mitchell, L. K., & Krumboltz, J. D. (1996). Krumboltz's learning theory of career choice and counseling. In D. Brown, L. Brooks & Associates (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development* (3rd ed., pp. 223-280). San Francisco, California: Jossey Bass.

[128] Osipow, S. H., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1996). *Theories of career development* (4th ed.). Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.

[129] Sharf, R. S. (1997). *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling.* Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole.

[130] Savickas, M. L. (1993). Career counseling in the postmodern era. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy,* 7(3), 205-215.

[131] Young, R. A., Valach, L., & Collin, A. (1996). A Contextual Approach to Career. In D. Brown, L. Brooks & Associates (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development* (3rd ed., pp. 477-512). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[132] Reid, H. L. (2006). Constructing the Future: Transforming Career Guidance. In H. L. Reid & J. Bimrose (Eds.), *Career Guidance, Constructing the Future: transforming careers guidance* (pp. 7-19). Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance.

ourselves (Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995, p.56[133]). These approaches to career are therefore significantly and fundamentally different from the 'traditional scientific' approach that previously dominated service delivery (Cochran, 1997[134]; Savickas, 1997[135]; Peavy, 2000[136]; Young & Collin, 2004[137]). However, a fundamental tension exists between these constructivist approaches to careers work and evidence-based theorists (such as: Mayston, 2002[138]; Magnusson & Lalande, 2005[139]; and Sampson, 2008[140]), whose research is informed by differing philosophical ideologies and differing theoretical frameworks. Tensions are particularly evident in terms of the different priorities attached to capturing client narratives, versus capturing evidence from clients on the impact of career interventions. In terms of developing a robust evidence base for adult guidance, it becomes increasingly important to reconcile these differences.

6.5 Developing new understandings within the careers workforce

This longitudinal research study provides clear evidence of what constitutes effective guidance interventions and the extent to which these inform and shape individual's career trajectories. To develop and extend this evidence base, a shift is required in at least two directions. Firstly, a commitment by adult guidance organisations to engage actively in gathering evidence on the impact of career interventions and to achieve consistency in approach, whilst recognising the differing types and backgrounds of clients served by individual providers. Findings from a recent pilot study in the North East of England (Brett, Costello, Gration, Hughes, & O'Brien, 2008[141]) highlighted how practitioners and managers generally believe in the need to

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[133] Chartrand, J. M., Strong, S. R., & Weitzman, L. M. (1995). The interactional perspective in vocational psychology: paradigms, theories and research practices. In W. B. Walsh & S. H. Osipow (Eds.), *Handbook of Vocational Psychology: Theory, Practice and Research* (2nd ed., pp. 35-66). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[134] Cochran, L. (1997). *Career Counselling: A Narrative Approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[135] Op cit.

[136] Peavy, R. V. (2000). A Socio-Dynamic Perspective for Counselling. *Australian Journal of Career Development,* 9(1), 17-24.

[137] Young, R. A., & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: Constructivism and Social Constructionism in the Career Field. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Special issue on constructivism, social constructionism and career), 64(3), 373 -388.

[138] Op cit.

[139] Magnusson, K., & Lalande, V. (2005). New Strides in Canadian Career Development Research. *The Career Counsellor Newsletter Canadian Career Development Foundation*, 17, 3-4.

[140] Sampson, J. P. (2008). *Designing and Implementing Career Programs: A Handbook for Effective Practice.* Broken Arrow, OK: National Career Development Association.

[141] Brett, M., Costello, E., Gration, G., Hughes, D., & O'Brien, C. (2008). *Measuring the Impact of Nextstep Career Advice in the North East of England.* Derby: International Centre for

gather more client stories in order measure the impact of 'next step career advice', but they have had limited opportunities to develop this particular aspect of their work. In most cases, they indicated a strong desire to capture evidence on impact in a more systematic and meaningful way. A key lesson learned is the need for policy-makers and managers to move beyond 'simple explanation of the rationale for data collection' towards a more 'inclusive practitioner/ manager approach' whereby individuals' learn more about the complexity, opportunities and challenges associated with measuring the impact of services and, in particular, the benefits of building a stronger evidence-base for careers work. This links directly to the concept of firmly embedding evidence based practice into the newly proposed workforce development strategy for advisers in the UK.

Secondly, the careers profession has to become more committed and proficient in capturing clients' life and career stories by using information, communication technologies (ICT) as a vehicle for systematic data collection, collation and analyses. The goal is to move towards using data more effectively to identify types or groups, whilst simultaneously recognising that these socially constructed categories offer, in the first instance, no more than a simple framework for similarities and differences in career journeys to be analysed. At a basic level ICT facilities offer huge potential to generate volume so that a broad range of individuals' *career* journeys can emerge to form themes and patterns which can then be used in various ways. Currently, volume of evidence on the impact of career interventions is a weak feature in the UK career professions existing evidence base repertoire. By harnessing ICT more comprehensively, 'real life' career narratives and trajectories could be used as tools to up-skill the guidance workforce (for example, by using stories to analyse interventions and/or critical incidents). In addition, 'real life' career narratives can feed into the design and development of new approaches/ tools for clients' use as part of their career learning experiences.

Both of these exemplars represent approaches that could potentially unite constructivists and evidence base theorists. For example, the urgent need to understand the impact of gender or ethnic origin requires a focus on career narratives than can be listened to, captured and analysed from differing viewpoints. Guidance services that were supported by more sophisticated and accessible forms of ICT, would offer a coherent framework for organising and systematising the

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Guidance Studies, University of Derby. Retrieved 6 August 2008, from http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/measuring_the_impact_of_nextstep_2008.pdf.

complexity of adult's lives - viewed through a new contemporary lens that connects the expertise of the practitioner; the lived experience and expertise of the client; and the expectant policy maker faced with the dilemma of how best to allocate scarce resources.

Assessing and measuring the impact of careers work is not simply about measurement; it is more about effective communication and building a learning community that has a strong and confident multi-dimensional voice that responds well to the pressure from policy-makers and consumers to deliver more relevant and cost-effective interventions[142]. This will require workforce development activities based on this particular theme, designed to enable practitioners and managers to recognise the limitations of certain approaches as well as the opportunities that can be accrued through more innovative approaches to data collection, client follow-up and reporting mechanisms. Trans-national collaboration can also help translate career theories and practices for new and interesting comparative studies to emerge.

6.6 Developing an evidence base for the UK

Within the broad community of guidance policy and practice, it is generally acknowledged that robust and reliable evidence of impact from longitudinal studies has, until now, been lacking. The complexity of adult career trajectories, the inconsistency of the guidance services offered to clients across contexts and over time, together with the lack of consensus regarding approaches to evaluation methodologies of impact, means that the parameters and limitations of any impact study need to be clearly defined – as they have for this research. Data from this qualitative, longitudinal case study complements and extends existing evidence accrued from quantitative studies. It provides insights into precisely what clients of one-to-one guidance interventions value from their guidance interviews, gives a valuable indication of how 29 clients regard the usefulness of their guidance intervention over a five year period and has tested a methodology for the collection of data from clients over time which has proved to be reliable and valid.

[142] Hughes, D. (2008). *Building the UK Evidence Base for Careers Work*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Derby, Derby. p. 28.

7. Conclusions and issues arising

The new Adult Advancement and Careers Service

Findings from this five year longitudinal study into the effectiveness of guidance are particularly timely, given the implementation of the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service in England, from August, 2010. The policy commitment to this new service marks the formal recognition of a need to support all adults in transition in an increasingly complex and volatile labour market. This research provides clear indications of the precise nature of guidance valued by clients and the workforce development needs required to ensure a world class Adult Advancement and Careers service.

The role of the 'user voice' in researching impact

The 'user voice' has consistently been the focus of this five year longitudinal study. The qualitative methodology used has proved very successful in yielding rich insights into if, and how, clients find guidance services effective. Data collected over time have continued to provide a deep understanding of the perceptions of the recipients of guidance, not only immediately after an intervention, but in the intermediate and longer term. Longitudinal studies are time consuming and costly to complete. Results from this investigation are particularly valuable since they complement and extend existing understandings that has largely been derived from quantitative studies. Clearly, there is significant potential to harness the voice of the user by practitioners gaining consent for on-going follow up activities and securing testimonials on what does and does not work from a user perspective. This, in turn, should influence both training and project development opportunities.

Attrition rate

The study has benefitted from a high rate of participation over the five years. Only 21 of the original 50 clients have been lost at various stages – with over half of the participants (58%, n= 29) being followed up for four consecutive years after their guidance intervention that was the focus of the first year of this study[143]. The final sample comprised 18 female (62%) and 11 males (11). The gender ratio of clients in the final sample was, therefore, similar to that in the initial phase of investigation with more females lost to the study than males, overall. Clients from minority ethnic

[143] One dropped out in the third year of follow-up, because she was travelling abroad and then re-joined the study in the final year.

groups (7%, n=2) and individuals with disabilities (17%, n=5) were also represented in the final sample. An analysis of data collected for those who withdrew from the study at different stages of the study is beyond the scope of this report, but will be subject of further investigation. The consistently high level of participation can be attributed, at least in part, to the skill of the field researchers in interviewing, as well as the willingness of clients to talk openly about their career development.

Guidance-in-action

A key finding from the first year of investigation related to the model of guidance in action that emerged from an in-depth analysis of 50 interview transcripts. This model consisted of four broad categories and forty sub-sets of practitioner interventions that occurred across the guidance interviews. The four broad categories were: building a working alliance; exploring potential; identifying options and strategies; and ending, follow-through. From this analysis, it became clear that a 'matching' approach dominated in practice. This finding is confirmed by other published research findings. There are a number of possible explanations for practice being strongly influenced by a framework that was developed over a century ago, in starkly different labour market conditions. These explanations include expectations of clients, resource constraints on practice and service delivery target requirements - all of which are reinforced by most existing computer aided guidance systems. The failure to embed evidence-based frameworks for practice, which have been specifically developed to address equality and diversity issues in addition to responding to changing labour market conditions, represents a challenge requiring changes to work-based assessment and investment in the careers workforce.

Barriers to progression

Four serious barriers to career advancement were identified from the study. These were impeding individual progress by preventing clients from implementing the action plans agreed during the case study interview. All were external to the guidance intervention and perceived by the individuals confronting them as beyond their control. They comprised: financial constraints; care responsibilities; health issues; and local labour market conditions. Guidance interventions required to assist clients grappling with these types of structural problems are likely to depend on practitioners involving themselves more actively in an advocacy role and engaging more fully with the systems that are creating the difficulties.

Prolonged transitions

Many who received guidance either whilst undertaking higher education, or after having recently completed their degrees, were engaged in prolonged transitions into the labour market. This finding is consistent with other research findings into the nature of graduate transitions. These individuals were using various strategies to progress. Specifically, they were testing out possible employment options; or they were using employment to 'buy time', until other issues in their lives were resolved; or they were using various employment experiences as a method of clarifying their own personal values. Often, there was an expectation amongst such individuals that it would take time to settle into a niche and that their 'career' was something they would construct, actively, over a period of time with support from various sources..

Fourfold typology of career decision making styles

In the third year of this investigation (that is, the second year of follow-up), a fourfold typology of career decision-making styles began to emerge from the data. This typology was tested in both the fourth and fifth years of the research and found to be robust. Groups of clients were exhibiting distinctive and consistent patters of behaviours in relation to their career decision making. These were: strategic, evaluative, aspirational or opportunistic styles and seem not only to influence decision making behaviour, but also other perceptions and values (for example, the 'ideal job'). The typology has implications for enhancing guidance services, so that individual preferences for approaching and dealing with career progression are acknowledged and accommodated.

Qualification levels of participants

Overall, data show an increase in qualification levels of clients over the period of the study, irrespective of the organisational contexts in which the initial case study interview took place. Although a significant amount of evidence shows a possible link between IAG and increased levels of participation in learning and/ or training, there is little or no evidence that shows that career guidance results in significant improvement in academic attainment *per se*, above and beyond that which one would expect from increased levels of participation. For example, one study[144] found that employees who had received guidance had achieved a higher rate of

[144] Killeen, J., & White, M. (2000). *The Impact of Careers Guidance on Adult Unemployed People* (No. RR226, Research Report). Sheffield: Department of Education and Employment. Retrieved 16 December 2008, from http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR226.PDF.

qualification than a comparison sample, but this was in-line with the increased rate of participation and the analysis was not extended to consider relative wastage. The completion of degree courses by participants from higher education accounts for a large proportion of the increase in qualifications in this study. However, there is one example where a client sought guidance because she was considering withdrawing from her degree course. As a direct result of her guidance, she changed her degree course and successfully completed her higher education.

Changes in employment status

Over the five year period, the number of clients registered as unemployed has decreased, from 34% to 3%. This does not include one client who has suffered persistent poor health and was, therefore, not available for work. The proportion of clients who have entered full-time employment since the beginning of the study has increased from 31% (n=9) to 45% (n=13). The proportion of those in part-time employment has also increased over the period of the study from 10% (n=3) to 31% (n=9). The number of clients in full-time education and/or training has decreased over the period of study (mainly a reflection of clients leaving higher education and moving into employment). The number of clients participating in training and/or education whilst in full-time employment has increased over the five year period.

Changing perceptions of 'useful' guidance

By comparing the responses from the 29 clients who remained in the study over the five year period, a pattern of changed perceptions emerges. Immediately after their guidance interview, 100% (n=29) of the final participants reported that they had found it useful; one year on, 90% (n=26) still indicated the guidance had been useful, with 10% (n=3) less sure; two years on, 79% (n=23) indicated it was useful, 17% (n=5) were less sure and one other had a more limited memory; three years on, the same proportion indicated its usefulness, 79% (n=23), with 7% (n=2) now less sure and 14% (n=4) having limited, or no, recall of the intervention; four years on, 69% (n=20) of clients still believed that the guidance had been useful, with 21% (n=6) being less sure of its usefulness and 10% (n=3) having either limited, or no, recollection.

Despite the percentage of clients remaining positive about their guidance having decreased by 31%, well over half remaining in the study over the period of five years still viewed their guidance as having been 'useful' to them[145].

[145] This represents 40% of the original sample of 50 participants in the study.

How clients perceive 'useful' guidance?

Throughout the five year study, recurrent themes arose when clients were probed about what it was, exactly, that they found useful about guidance. These themes related to guidance being useful when it: provides access to specialist information, including local labour market information, details of courses, training and employment opportunities; provides insights, focus and clarification; motivates (e.g. progress ideas, try something new or explore options); increases self-confidence and self-awareness; and/ or structures opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Limitations of guidance

Overall, six of the 29 clients in the final year of study felt their guidance had little, or no, impact on their progression. For these individuals, guidance could not help them because the barriers they faced were too great (for example, chronic and persistent ill-health), or their uncertainty and/or values made them hard to help. For clients facing serious structural barriers to their career progression, a one-off guidance intervention is unlikely to have any impact on their situation. Longer-term and more specialist interventions would be required to make a difference.

The role of action plans in career progression

Of the 29 clients participating in all of the five years of this study, the majority (86%, n=25) had agreed action plans with practitioners during their initial case study interview. In the final three years of the study, however, clients' recollection of their action plans grew vague, so analysis was focused on plans that they were actively pursuing[146]. Two years after the case study interview, 52% (n=15) of the clients who participated throughout were proactively pursuing plans. Three years on, this proportion had increased to 66% (n=19). By the fourth and final year, this percentage had fallen again to 41% (n=12). This variation in the numbers of clients pursuing action over time can be accounted for by changes in their circumstances, over the five year period. This finding invites some consideration of the role of action plans for adults, both in the short and longer term. They should be developed as an integral part of a learning process that the client values and owns, rather than as an instrument for practitioners or service delivery targets.

Career management competencies

[146] Plans that are actively being pursued may, or may not, relate to action plans agreed in the case study interviews.

The development of career management competencies has been an integral part of clients' learning and development over the last five years. For some, these were developed as part of guidance they received in their case study interview. For others, they have been acquired by exploring possible opportunities, or through talking to family, friends and colleagues. Examples include: investigating training and employment opportunities (38%, n=11); understanding how the labour market operates (66%, n=19); and knowledge of employer requirements (41%, n=12).

Perceptions of 'career'

In the final year of the study (2007/08), the proportion of clients feeling that they had a career had increased to half of the sample (50%, n=13). Of these, one felt he had a career, but did not want one (because he wanted to do something creative, rather than the administrative job in which he was employed). Eight (31%) felt that they did not have a career yet, but it was something they were working towards. Three (12%) were unsure whether they had a career - they would like one, but this would require changing jobs or retraining. Only two clients in the final year of the study did not believe they had a career. One of these was in full-time employment which he regarded 'just as a job', rather than a career. The other was 'still a student'.

Perceptions of what career means remained largely unchanged over the five year period of the study. For one client having a career meant having 'an aim and a focus' and 'being valued'. However, for the majority, it related to requirements for higher level qualifications; reasonable experience in the field; achieving a higher status in the organisation; progressing within a chosen occupation; or reaching a position of authority.

Further guidance

Evidence from the study indicates that clients seek advice and guidance from a range of sources, including: professional guidance practitioners, family and friends, colleagues, mentors and tutors. Whilst a high proportion of clients (90%, n=26) have received advice and help with their career decisions from family, friends, colleagues and/or tutors over the period of study, only 38% of clients (n=11) had received further guidance and/or professional help. One reported that they no longer knew where to access help as her local careers office had shut. Although formal guidance may be overshadowed by informal influences, its 'unique selling point' may be the reassurance of impartial and professional authority that it confers.

When asked whether they would seek guidance in the future, the majority of clients indicated that they would seek guidance from a professional in the future (72%, n=21).

Evaluating effective guidance

The original brief for this research study was to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance in England over a five year period, from the perspective of the client receiving the guidance. With the current lack of clarity surrounding the study of impact, the evaluation of effective guidance is multi-faceted and complex. The need for further work in this area was one of the major issues that emerged from the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review (OECD, 2004[147]) as well as a related review conducted for the European Commission (Sultana, 2003a[148]). Additionally, it has been noted that most policy-makers rely on a very limited evidence base when evaluating the inputs, processes and outputs of career guidance services (Sultana, 2003b[149]).

Developing new understandings in the careers workforce

This longitudinal research study provides clear evidence of what constitutes effective guidance interventions and the extent to which these inform and shape individual's career trajectories. To develop and extend this evidence base, a shift is required in at least two directions. Firstly, a commitment by adult guidance organisations to engage actively in gathering evidence on the impact of career interventions and to achieve consistency in approach, whilst recognising the differing types and backgrounds of clients served by individual providers. Secondly, the careers profession has to become more committed and proficient in capturing clients' life and career stories by using information, communication technologies (ICT) as a vehicle for systematic data collection, collation and analyses.

Overall, data from this qualitative, longitudinal case study complements and extends existing evidence accrued from quantitative studies. It provides insights into precisely what clients value from their guidance, gives a valuable indication of how 29 clients regard the usefulness of their guidance intervention over a five year period and has tested a methodology for the collection of data from clients over time which has proved to be robust.

[147] OECD. (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved 29 April 2008, from http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/45/34050171.pdf.
[148] Op cit.
[149] Op cit.

The final section of this report presents recommendations from this study.

8. Recommendations

The new Adult Advancement and Careers Service is at an early stage in terms of its design, implementation and eventual roll-out in England. New prototypes are currently underway to trial and test out the efficacy of planning and delivering different types of career interventions, both within and outside the workplace. The research findings from this longitudinal study provide insights to what clients consider as advancement and how they have accessed and experienced personalised career guidance services over time. It is clear that lessons learned from individuals' rich and often complex learning journeys indicate ways forward for helping to build a world-class Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

In view of the findings from this study, the following recommendations are offered on related areas:

At a policy level:

- strategies are developed to build capacity and competences within the careers workforce, which incorporate new approaches to assessing and measuring the impact of interventions. (This should feed into the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) qualifications strategy consultation framework);
- performance targets include larger volumes of soft outcome measures, based on what clients value from guidance, drawing both on these research findings and best practice;
- ICT facilities are harnessed to capture data on adults' learning and career trajectories, over time. This would provide a rigorous evidence base for improving initial and continuing training and service provision, as well as helping to ensure that services are more responsive to client need. It is, however, recognised that the extent to which practitioners are sufficiently skilled to deliver high quality web-based guidance alongside the more intensive service-delivery element of their everyday work may need first to be reviewed;
- findings from this study are used to ensure a smooth transition for users leaving young people's services and moving to the adult services;
- further research is commissioned to build on findings from this longitudinal research. For example, closer investigation of the contexts in which practitioners operate would increase understanding of how to support

workforce development effectively; and further investigation of the typology of career decision with a larger sample would test its reliability further, as a framework that could be used to improve practice.

At a professional level:

- supervision arrangements are in place to support practitioners learning from cases studies that have emerged from this and other research;
- the career decision making typology is utilised to test out the extent to which practice needs to adapt to rapidly changing social and economic developments;
- the extent to which current approaches to quality assurance place the voice of the users central to the guidance process is reviewed;
- in-house strategies and tactics for nurturing client feedback that go beyond a one-off client satisfaction survey are developed. A move towards greater levels of self-assessment based on the real experiences of the local or regional client-base could provide an impetus for change and inform the development of high quality adult advancement and careers services;
- practitioners are challenged to demonstrate their competence by being clearer about the theoretical underpinnings that inform their work with clients from a range of differing cultures and backgrounds and that go beyond 'matching' approaches.
- the four-fold career decision typology is used as a benchmark to audit practice and assess the extent to which their clients are empowered to take control of their learning and career development. This would require investment in follow-up activities on a planned basis;
- services retain their focus on how clients value, highly, the reassurance of professional authority and the impartiality that this confers; and
- an investment is made in professional development activities that focus on new ways of working with clients both within and outside the workplace. This means adapting to the use of ICT in guidance, as well as working with the systems that create barriers to participation in learning and work.

At the level of training:

- novice practitioners are supported to implement effective practice that systematically integrates face-to-face intensive support services with the use of ICT web-based facilities;.

- students and training participants are required to build on findings about what clients regard as effective practice and think more creatively about new ways of reaching out, and connecting with larger volumes of potential end users;
- the fourfold typology is used as a framework for helping trainees to understand their own career decision making style and identify the application of this framework to their practice.

Appendix 1: Final follow-up interview proforma

CASE STUDY RESEARCH INTO EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE

PHASE 3 YEAR 4 (2007-2008)

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 – this is the final year we will be contacting you for this information. "

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 over the year?

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

N.B. Ensure that you are familiar with each client's situation one year ago, anticipate changes as far as is possible, and probe for further changes, influences and barriers.

2. Career development and changes over the last 12 months:
Pick up and question any plans that clients talked about doing in the year 3 follow-up interview.

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
- taking a year out
- redundant
- full-time caring commitments
- suffering from ill health (nature?)
- promoted since you spoke last year
- in receipt of a pay rise

Check what the highest qualification they have gained is. (Note if they are currently working towards a higher qualification.)

N.B. We are tracking clients' career trajectories and changes in qualification level so these details are crucial.

3. Reflections on initial guidance interview (case study) and further guidance:
N.B. Check whether the client was able to remember their guidance interview at the last follow-up interview. The role of the initial guidance interview in the clients' progress is key to the research findings. In particularly, we need to try to find out if clients feel the usefulness of their guidance diminishes with time.
Referring back to the initial case study interview, check whether they still think their initial guidance interview was useful and why.

Looking back do they think the guidance interview influenced where and what they are doing today? Explore.

Thinking about their progress / changes /experiences over the last 5 years, what do they think the guidance should have done?

4. Further help and support in achieving career goals:
Check whether they have had any further formal career guidance over the last year. If so, 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?

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?
- Other professional (who)?

If so, probe: where, who and when; plus usefulness, information gained and whether any action was agreed.

Want additional help or information do they think would help with their career / goals / plans / action both now and in the future?

5. Client self-reflections:
Since this is the final year of data collection, where possible and appropriate please ask these questions and / or revise as necessary:

- How do they think / fell they have changed over the last 5 years?
- Subjective changes….
- Increase confidence in self
- Increased confidence in skills
- Change in thinking
- Better understanding of self / skills /interests / qualities / abilities / limitations
- Greater understanding of options available to them
- Skill level improved

Objective changes…

- New job / career
- New qualification / skills
- New career direction

How do they feel they have progressed professionally (in terms of career) and personally?

What have they learnt about careers / jobs / employment?

Do they think they have a better understanding of where they are going and what they have to do to achieve that?

To what do they attribute these changes? (i.e. self, determination, self-belief, guidance practitioner, advice from others, support of friends / family / colleague etc.). Please record combinations of such factors.

6. Decision making:

N.B. Where possible and appropriate please ask these questions and / or revise as necessary.

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

How have they made decisions about their career / future / progression?

- Planned or unplanned?
- If unplanned, how do they tend to operate? (e.g. do they tend to take opportunities as they present themselves – or is their process more chaotic?)
- Are decisions based on practical, logical considerations or reflections?
- Do they tend to follow their head or their heart?
- Do they feel that they have been able to exercise choice over their career decisions, or do they feel constrained by the circumstances in which they find themselves?

7. Influences and constraints:

N.B. We need to explore career resilience. Please use your discretion on the appropriateness of these questions for each client.

If appropriate ask what do they think has influenced / constrained their career choices over the last 5 years:

- Lack of confidence?
- Incorrect or inappropriate qualification and/or skills?
- Health?
- Lack of finances or financial responsibilities?
- Transport?
- Caring commitments?
- Other? (please specify)

With the benefit of hindsight, do they think they would do things differently? Explore

How do they overcome or manage obstacles / 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?

8. Future plans:
Ask if they could do any job, what would it be and why?

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

- What are their next steps in terms of their career?
- Do they anticipate any particular problems or barriers to overcome?

9. Conclusions:
Remind clients that this is the final time we will contact them for this particular research project. However, indicate that we are pursuing continuation funding for the project and should we be successful, ask if they would be willing to be contacted by telephone in a year. If yes, say we will send them a letter to confirm details.

Ask if they would like a summary of the project's findings to be sent (will be autumn 2008).

Thank clients for all their help and time spent talking to us saying how much we appreciate it.

Appendix 2: Emergent codes from 2007/08 follow-up

Code description	Number of interviews coded	Percentage of interviews n=29
1 evaluative career decision making	6	21%
2 strategic career decision making	7	24%
3 opportunistic career decision making	9	31%
4 aspirational career decision making	3	10%
5 initial guidance still considered useful	19	66%
6 unsure of usefulness of initial guidance	5	17%
7 limited or no recollection of initial guidance	5	17%
8 what guidance should or should not do	23	79%
9 career self management skills - research	11	38%
10 constraint(s) on progression or career plans	23	79%
11 over last year - started or enrolled on education or training course	9	31%
12 over last year - moved location and/or house	8	28%
13 active future plans	12	41%
14 merged with 29		
15 over last year - changes in job role	8	28%
16 received further guidance and/or professional help	11	38%
17 would seek IAG in future	21	72%
18 merged with 13		
19 career decision making/advice/support from family, friends, colleagues etc.	26	90%
20 needs future help with	13	45%
22 direction and plans	15	52%
23 no career at present	8	28%
24 yes have career	13	45%
25 unsure whether have career	3	10%
26 no career	5	17%
27 merged with 29		
28 discusses finances	24	83%
29 identified future possibilities	26	90%
30 career and personal history	26	90%
31 positively able to deal with setbacks	13	45%

32 over last year - completed education and/or training course	9	31%
33 over last year - started work or found new job	8	28%
34 further guidance failed	5	17%
35 gained new skills	21	72%
36 learning from experience	22	76%
37 positive influence of IAG	21	72%
38 IAG could do no more	3	10%
39 over last year - job progression	5	17%
40 over last year - change in personal circumstances	7	24%
41 over last year - on-job-training	9	31%
42 career management skills - understands options	19	66%
43 over last year - volunteering	5	17%
44 career management skills - knowing what is required	12	41%
45 over last year - work experience or placement	4	14%
46 not sure of direction	13	45%
47 improved self-confidence	20	69%
48 understanding of self	28	97%
49 self-reflection on situation	29	100%
50 better able to make decisions	2	7%
51 over last year - career break	3	10%
52 over last year - engaged in personal development	5	17%
53 barriers to progression - personal (i.e. poor health, age)	4	14%
54 over last year - applied for work	7	24%
55 over last year - on benefits or unemployed	3	10%
56 over last year - in employment	22	76%
57 barriers to progression - external (i.e. local labour market conditions)	2	7%
58 client does not know where to get help	1	3%
59 over the last year - resigned job	1	3%

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 the reference is made to aggregate codes.