

Careerquake

Policy supports for
self-managed careers

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Introduction

Careers are what give shape to many people's working lives. In their 20th century form, they have offered the chance to rise upwards, to gain in status and reward. As such they have been a prominent feature of private and public bureaucracies, and of the professions. They have provided a stable identity, a way of motivating employees and of tying personal to organisational goals.

Such careers have only, however, been available to a minority of people – mainly white, middle-class men. The pyramidal structure of most work organisations meant that opportunities for progression were necessarily limited. Nor did careers touch the large numbers of people who worked on their own or in small organisations, in domestic work or as child carers, or the unemployed.

Currently, many who have been accustomed to having a career are seeing it stripped from them. In organisations as various as Unilever and the senior civil service, downsizing and delayering are playing havoc with existing career structures. Commentators are proclaiming 'the end of jobs'¹ and even 'the end of work'.²

Yet at the same time there are powerful forces widening access to careers. Nearly a third of each new age cohort is now going through higher education, compared to less than one in twenty at the beginning of the 1960s.³ The proportion leaving school with qualifications has steadily risen too. Amongst employers there is growing demand for skilled labour, with managers and professionals the two fastest

growing categories of job both in the last decade and, if forecasters are to be believed, in the next one as well.⁴

Powerful voices have been arguing that this democratisation of careers should be encouraged and extended. The Confederation of British Industry has advanced the concept of 'careers for all' – based on more individually-driven careers, linked to continuous learning throughout life – as the means of achieving the 'skills revolution' Britain requires if it is to achieve competitive advantage in the global economy.⁵

This Argument takes the case a step further. It suggests that careers can become part of the normal experience of work for the great majority – but only if the right support structures are put in place. It shows that careers can become more personal – more under the control of individuals rather than big organisations – but not if individuals are left to fend for themselves.

The body of the Argument is in four main sections. The following section briefly examines the nature of the careerquake and its current effects. The next section outlines a possible new model of career, while the third section indicates the policy measures that will be needed to implement the model. The final section summarises the paper's conclusions.

Careerquake

The transformation of careers stems chiefly from two linked forces: the impact of new technology, and the globalisation of the economy. Technological change continually transforms the nature of work organisation; global competition puts intense pressures on organisations to drive costs down, to innovate and to adapt.

Within the UK, government policy has sought actively to support such flexibility through deregulation of labour markets. It has also applied market disciplines to the public sector, through privatisation, internal markets and decentralised management, designed to improve efficiency and cut costs. As a result of these pressures, many organisations have devolved and decentralised decision-making, and reduced layers of management or supervision. Processes like Total Quality Management and Business Process Re-engineering have challenged existing structures and roles. Some organisations have begun to define themselves as 'learning organisations'.⁶ Even in more conventional organisations, rigid job demarcation is rapidly disappearing.⁷ Clearly differentiated and discrete roles – and the orderly career paths that go with them – are increasingly being replaced by team-working and multi-skilling.

There has also been a shift away from 'bigness'. One form this takes is increased 'outsourcing' and contracting out to suppliers: nearly three-quarters of companies now contract out at least some non-core operations.⁸ More employees now work in small firms – by the end of the decade it is forecast that 50 per cent of the private sector workforce

will be in firms of less than fifty employees.⁹ More people are self-employed.¹⁰ More are working part-time¹¹ or on short-term contracts.¹²

Charles Handy uses the image of the shamrock to represent the new flexible firm, with its three leaves: the core of professional technicians and managers; the contractual fringe of self-employed or self-contracting specialists; and the flexible labour force of temporary and part-time workers.¹³ The flowering of the shamrock seems likely to continue. A survey of 150 major companies found that over the next four years, four in five employers predicted an increase in flexible working, and 70 per cent a rise in contracting out.¹⁴

The effect of these trends is a profound change in the 'psychological contract' between the individual and the organisation – their perceptions of the obligations each has to the other. The traditional contract was a long-term *relational* one, based on security and reciprocal loyalty: this has largely broken down. Now the contract tends increasingly to be a short-term *transactional* one, based on a narrower and more purely economic exchange. Even where the relational contract survives – as in companies like Rover and Marks & Spencer – it commonly involves exchanging job security for greater task flexibility.¹⁵

In either case, the contract now requires regular renegotiation. It pressurises individuals to take more responsibility for their own career development, including learning new skills and knowledge. Security, it is argued, lies now not in *employment* but in *employability*: accumulating skills and reputation that can be invested in new opportunities as they arise.¹⁶ Individuals, whether formally self-employed or not, are being encouraged to *regard* themselves as self-employed, taking responsibility for their own career-long self-development.¹⁷

These are not inherently unattractive ideas. They can facilitate more fluid careers with more choice. But against a background of continuing unemployment, few people experience these changes as empowering, particularly those without skills. For them, flexibility can become a euphemism for naked exercise by employers of labour-market power – as in zero-hours contracts.¹⁸

Even those with more bargaining power are deeply affected by the new insecurities. Less job security makes it hard to plan for the future,

hard to pay for mortgages or pension and hard to 'settle down' into a stable life-style.

In short, the democratisation of careers has barely started and is not being managed successfully. Far too many remain wholly excluded and far too many do not feel in control of their working lives.

Seeking a new model

Around the world there are stark differences in how careers are organised. In the USA, for example, careers are conceived in individualistic terms, with ‘winner takes all’ markets¹⁹ and less state support for those who fail to get on to the ladder. Some of the most successful entrepreneurs had no formal education, or dropped out of college. At the other extreme, the Japanese system is based on long-term work relationships and greater respect for formal qualifications. While the ‘lifetime employment system’ in its full form is confined to a minority, its cultural influence is extensive. There is little labour mobility. Income is based on loyalty to the company and length of service, as well as skill. Wage and salary differentials are more compressed than in the USA; not only large companies, but also members of the sub-contractual networks linked to them, take a strong paternalistic responsibility for their employees, including training and retraining. Continental European countries, particularly in northern Europe, again have their own distinctive models, based on corporatism, apprenticeships and strong trade unions.

The UK sits between these various approaches. Along with the USA, the UK now has one of the most deregulated labour markets in the developed world.²⁰ But it also still has, in relative terms, larger trade unions and a larger public sector than the USA does.

There is much argument about whether the UK should go further in the direction of the USA, or whether it should seek to emulate

continental Europe's more regulated labour markets. But there is little dispute that poor levels of skill remain one of the UK's critical economic weaknesses. In terms of the spread and level of qualifications, the UK is behind most of its major competitors.

The failure to update skills, and the failure to provide supports for careers, holds back individuals as well as the national economy. It locks the UK out of the healthy virtuous circles that can be observed in other countries. Well-trained workers and modern infrastructures attract global capital in creating relatively good jobs; these jobs, in turn, generate additional on-the-job training and experience, thus creating an added attraction to footloose capital.²¹

At the moment, however, there are signs of the opposite happening, with substantial parts of the labour market trapped in a low-skills, low-wage equilibrium.²² Employers tend to restrict their training commitment to their limited core workers. Those outside the core have to plan and finance their own training in order to maintain their employability, but are rarely prepared or able to do so. The result is that such workers are likely to be caught in what the CBI calls 'a cycle of relative deprivation'.²³

Even from the viewpoint of immediate employer demand, these trends are worrying. The Skill Needs in Britain Survey found that in 1995 71 per cent of employers reported that the skills needed by their 'average employee' were increasing.²⁴ The automation of routine tasks means that the need for low-skill labour is declining. The work content of many middle-level jobs is being upgraded. In traditional skilled jobs, for example, there is a shift away from skills associated with manual dexterity towards those associated with the understanding and monitoring of complex systems.²⁵ These trends are particularly strong in manufacturing, the sector most exposed to international competition.

The trends may however be less strong in the more protected and less 'automatable' parts of the services sector. There has for example been an increase of low-wage, low-skill 'McJobs', based on routinised encounters.²⁶ Some commentators, notably Peter Robinson of the LSE, have accordingly argued that the current National Targets for Education and Training exceed labour-market needs.²⁷ Some people

get stuck in these jobs, but others – like many in fast-food chains – tend to be taken by young people in transition, suggesting that they could be seen not as a life sentence but as a temporary experience, providing an initial experience of work disciplines, filling in gaps, or helping to fund studies – before moving onto more demanding roles.

The new career

How might a rethink about careers contribute to a labour market which gives more people more opportunities to take control of their working life? The major trends in the labour market have made the traditional idea of the career obsolete, relevant neither for managers and professionals nor for the many millions who want a more flexible pattern of work.

We therefore need to broaden the idea of the career. Instead of being viewed narrowly as progression up the hierarchy within an organisation, it should be viewed as the individual's lifelong progression in learning and in work. The breadth of these terms is important.

'Learning' embraces not only formal education and training, but also informal forms of learning, in the workplace and elsewhere.

'Work' includes not only paid employment and self-employment, but also the many other forms of socially-valuable work, in households and in the community (including child-rearing and elder-care).

'Progression' covers not only vertical but also lateral movement: it is concerned with experience as well as positions, and with broadening as well as advancing. 'Progression' does however retain the sense of development: career is more than mere biography.

Such a concept should be able to incorporate attention not only to skill development but also to fluctuations in the life-cycle due to changing family commitments and changing values. Traditional organisational career patterns have tended to pay little attention to the demands of child-rearing, on the assumption that this was done by women and that careers were largely the property of men. More broadly-defined and individually-driven careers would in principle make it easier for both parents to negotiate how to fit their family

responsibilities with their paid work roles.²⁹ Such careers would also make it easier for individuals to withdraw gradually from paid work on retirement, rather than having a full-time job one day and nothing the next.

Most fundamentally, however, this new concept of career would provide a framework for encouraging all individuals to continue to learn and develop throughout life, linked to a sense of having a stake in the society of which they are part. It would thus make it possible for the whole population to participate in – and benefit from – the skills revolution which Britain needs in order to achieve international competitiveness.

Policy implications

If careers in the broader sense outlined in the chapter on ‘Seeking a new model’ are to be accessible to all, we need policies to back them up. Six are of particular importance:

- stronger incentives for learning;
- a more flexible and responsive learning system;
- a national qualifications framework;
- lifelong access to career guidance;
- stronger intermediary organisations between individuals and employers;
- more flexible financial-support structures.

Stronger incentives for learning

Learning is the key to progression in work. If individuals are to be able to move from work contract to work contract with some sense of development rather than mere survival, they need to find ways of enhancing their skills and knowledge on a continuing basis. Some of this will happen informally; some will happen formally alongside their work; some will require breaks from work.

For those already in employment, an important issue is the extent to which employers can be expected to deliver the training that is required by individuals within a flexible labour market. There are some signs

that employers are increasing their training efforts. The Skill Needs in Britain Survey found that the proportion of employees for whom employers reported funding or arranging off-the-job training had increased from 40 per cent in 1993 to 44 per cent in 1995.³⁰ On the other hand, at least some of this increase is in response to strengthened health and safety legislation, which – however welcome – is unlikely to raise work skill levels significantly. Also, other surveys show that those who already have high levels of education are five times more likely to receive training than those without formal qualifications.³¹

For those out of work, one of the most retrograde aspects of current social-security arrangements is the limitation on learning imposed by the ‘16-hour rule’, which means that claimants can only receive income support if they can demonstrate that attendance does not exceed 16 hours of supervised study per week, and that they are willing to terminate the course as soon as a suitable job becomes available. Such measures suggest that learning is simply a way of filling in time, rather than a bridge to opportunity. The pursuit of qualifications needs to be accepted as ‘actively seeking work’.

The third group, those in the flexible periphery of organisations, are much less likely to receive training than those in the core. A CBI study showed that employers are in general less prepared to accept responsibility for training their part-time and, particularly, their temporary staff, than they are for training their full-time and permanent employees.³²

Public policy regarding training in recent years has concentrated more on carrots than on sticks. An example is Investors in People: a kitemarking scheme designed to encourage employers to invest more strongly in the training and development of their employees. By September 1995, nearly 2,500 employers had attained the kitemarking standard, with over 17,000 others committed to doing so: between them, these employers employed around 4.5 million people.³³

Some employers have taken a broader approach to learning, seeking to encourage their employees to engage in learning as a valuable activity in its own right, rather than just because it responds to the employer’s immediate needs. The first major scheme of this kind was Ford Motor Company’s Employee Development and Training Programme. This

has been followed by a variety of employee development programmes based on broadly similar principles, some of them group programmes involving small and medium-size companies.³⁴

Within a flexible labour market employers need to be encouraged to replace a narrow approach to training with a broader approach to career development.³⁵ Such an approach needs to include development in the workplace as well as on training courses, and to focus on building future employability as well as on skills required for immediate use. Some companies are already doing this, as part of a new ‘psychological contract’ in which employers seek to offer employees security not by offering a ‘job for life’ but by providing training and development opportunities that will extend their marketable skills and sustain their ‘career resilience’.³⁶

In general, however, the rhetoric is running well ahead of the reality.³⁷ Employers readily acknowledge the need for people to be encouraged to participate in learning throughout their working lives. Most, though, are unwilling to provide any training that is not strictly related to immediate job needs.³⁸ Performance management systems create pressures which are contrary to the development interests of the individual: i.e. to perform rather than to learn.

In some parts of the labour market, employers are being driven to pay deeper attention to training and development in order to attract and retain the employees they need. Graduates, for example, now regard continual skills development as a new form of security which is one of the most important factors in choosing prospective employers.³⁹

Many employers, however, see little incentive to engage in investments from which their competitors may benefit rather than themselves. Employers have insufficient incentives to invest in their development, because they cannot be privately appropriated. Employers investing in skill development are adding to a common pool which is in principle accessible to other employers in the industry or the locality, many of which are their competitors.⁴⁰

Yet training is not an area where state provision is able readily to respond to market failure. The record of government training schemes is not impressive.⁴¹ The notion that places of work and places of learning

should be kept neatly apart, and that if this can be done, their separate interests will be optimally served, is now widely questioned.⁴² Workplaces – particularly those using state-of-the-art technology – are engines of learning as well as of production.

The key policy question therefore is what measures need to be taken to encourage employers to invest in training and development in their collective interest, and whether these measures should be voluntary or include an element of compulsion. Alongside the extension of schemes like Investors in People, an idea that has been attracting particular interest is the concept of individual learning accounts, to which government, employers and individuals would all contribute. The idea was advocated by the Borrie Commission, on the grounds that it would overcome the impasse between government, employers and individuals over who should finance training, and would provide a mechanism for recognising mutuality of interest by sharing costs.⁴³ The Dahrendorf Commission argue that contributions to such accounts should be compulsory, recognising that ‘while employers cannot offer lifetime employment, they have a responsibility to promote lifetime employability.’⁴⁴ The CBI by contrast, contended that the accounts should be voluntary,⁴⁵ to avoid a ‘tax on jobs’; the TUC agreed, to avoid compulsory employee contributions.⁴⁶ A compromise option might be to launch a voluntary scheme, with deferred legislation for a compulsory scheme if the voluntary approach proves ineffective.

The concept of individual learning accounts can take a number of different forms. There remain question marks over whether learning accounts should best be introduced as a centralised bureaucratic system, or as an employee right, with employers required to make contributions to an account managed by a third party which might be the state or another commercial or non-profit organisation (this might include trade unions). In most versions, the account can be drawn upon only if both individual and employer agree; when however employees move to a new employer, or become unemployed, it goes with the individual, and can be drawn upon by the individual alone with any learning supplier approved by the government or its agents. There are also unresolved issues about whether contributions should

be on a flat-rate basis – which might be held to discriminate against smaller firms and low-paid employees.

If the employer's contribution were to be compulsory, it would become, in effect, a modern form of training levy. A survey of TEC directors found that half supported the imposition of a training levy,⁴⁷ though a subsequent survey by the CBI found a lower level of support among employers generally.⁴⁸ Alternative levy-related concepts are the notion of an employee entitlement to a minimum statutory number of learning days (as in France and other European countries),⁴⁹ and/or to being enrolled on a programme linked to National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs). A merit of the latter is that it incorporates attention to on-the-job as well as off-the-job learning.

If employers' contributions were to be voluntary, the likely result would be to strengthen training cultures where they are already strong, primarily in large firms, while leaving untouched the cultures of those that do not train.

The key is likely to be a judicious mix of voluntary incentives and stronger requirements. At present, for employers, most incentives continue to be directed to areas of spending other than training.

If we are to be serious about supporting careers, employers should be required to pay a higher rate of employers national insurance where they cannot demonstrate that they are providing training linked to NVQs/SVQs or some other external standard (see 'A national qualifications framework', below).

Given that large firms currently spend more on training than small ones, there is also case for directing tax incentives more towards smaller firms, perhaps by rewarding those that contribute to individual learning accounts and/or achieve Investors in People standards, with additional rebates on national insurance payments. To make these spending commitments visible, there needs to be a statutory requirement to provide details of spending on training in published accounts. For individuals, spending on accredited learning programmes should also be tax-deductible. Contributions from their own income into the learning account could be counted against national insurance contributions in the subsequent year. The use of the Inland

Revenue to make it easier to take out loans secured against future earnings also needs to be investigated further.

An important limitation of any schemes dependent on employer or employee contributions is that while they may help many existing employees to maintain their employability within a flexible labour market, they may do little for those who are already most exposed to its ravages – including the unemployed and the self-employed (and, in the case for example of individual learning account schemes operating through the PAYE system, the 20 per cent of part-time workers who fall below the PAYE threshold).⁵⁰ For these groups, strong government funding of learning will continue to be needed, perhaps in the form of contributions into the individual's learning account.

A more flexible and responsive learning system

Complementing the need for stronger incentives to learning is the need for a learning system able to respond to learners' more flexible needs. Flexible work systems require flexible learning systems.

Learning systems usually reflect work systems. This has certainly been true in the industrial era. Just as work has been concentrated in large bureaucratic organisations, so has learning. Young people have been herded into schools and colleges, where they have acquired the attitudes and behaviours, and the base of skills and knowledge, required for their likely future in the workplace.⁵¹ An important role of the system has been to use exams to sort out those destined for different levels of careers and jobs.⁵²

Formal education has largely *preceded* employment. As the demands of the workplace have grown, it has done so for longer periods of time: the minimum school-leaving age has been progressively raised, further and higher education expanded, and the age of entry to the workplace deferred. But education has continued to be heavily 'front-loaded'. The relatively stable nature of work organisation has meant that any subsequent work-related learning has been largely provided within the organisation, with little need for recourse to formal learning systems.

Now, however, the new models of work are calling these models of learning into question. The pace of technological change means that the 'shelf-life' of work skills and knowledge are getting ever shorter. 'Just-in-time' work systems require 'just-in-time' learning. More frequent movement between jobs requires regular learning of new competencies. More and more jobs require 'multi-skilling': a broader and more flexible range of skills, demanding a wider base of understanding. Learning no longer precedes work: it is interwoven with work, on a lifelong basis.

Lifelong learning does not necessarily mean lifelong education. It embraces training, as well as more informal learning in the workplace and outside it. The education system has, however, a potentially important role to play in supporting such varied forms of learning, as well as providing formal learning opportunities which are detached from the narrow immediate concerns of the workplace.

If the education system is to play a central role in lifelong learning, it needs to be much more flexible than in the past, in two respects. First, it needs to establish much stronger links with the world of work, rather than standing aloof from it. It needs to view employers as its partners in learning, not as receivers of its products.

Second, course structures need to be adapted to make it much easier for individuals to move in and out of the formal learning system, and to design their own learning pathways, drawing from provision in different kinds of institution where appropriate. In other words, education institutions need to be integrated into a flexible and co-ordinated learning system, providing resources for individuals to use as and when they have particular learning needs.

One of the keys to such change in policy terms is to push spending control out to the end-user, backed up by improved access to information and guidance (see below). The faster that control over resources passes to students and trainees, the faster is likely to be the shift to more flexible models of learning.

Technology is also likely to be an important agent of change. It liberates knowledge, and the learning process, from institutions.⁵³ The traditional emphasis on class attendance as the core of educational

provision is outdated. Learning packages devised by teachers can now be used in the home, in the workplace, in community centres, and elsewhere. Learners can start when they like, work at their own pace, and complete when ready to do so. The value added by more direct forms of learner support needs to be more personal and more interactive: in one-to-one or small-group situations, and concerned not with transmitting information but with deepening understanding.

The emerging roles of the teacher within the more flexible learning system are accordingly four-fold. The first is as a learning *designer* – with ‘products’ ranging from books and video lectures to programme-learning packages, multi-media learning kits and various forms of experiential learning. The second is as a learning *co-ordinator*, linking human and material resources to objectives and methods so that they meet the needs and readiness of the learner. The third is as a learning *consultant*, helping the learner to overcome learning blockages and to engage at a deeper level with the meaning of what they are learning. The fourth is as a learning *assessor*, evaluating and accrediting the individual’s learning regardless of where and how it has been obtained.

A concept of lifelong learning based on these principles transforms the role of schools. Hitherto their models of learning have been dominated by public examinations, linked to their ‘sorting’ function. This has tended to encourage a narrowly instrumental approach to learning, focused on the ‘exchange value’ of examination certificates rather than the ‘use value’ of the learning itself.⁵⁴ This is powerfully symbolised by the ritual of students tearing up their books when they finish their exams.

Within a lifelong learning system, by contrast, the key role of the school is to foster young people’s motivation and confidence, and to develop their skills for learning how to learn. This requires very different curriculum models, with weaker emphasis on the boundaries between traditional school subjects, more stress on the interaction between theory and practice, and more use of community resources. Kolb’s model of learning as occurring in a four-stage cycle – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation⁵⁵ – needs to be built more strongly into school curricula.

One implication of this is that relationships between learning and work need to be established more strongly at an earlier stage. Education has long suffered from its early-industrial-era role – virtuous in its intention, but ultimately pernicious in its effects – of protecting young people from child labour. The boundaries between education and the world of work have been sharply marked, and tightly patrolled.

This has begun to change, and needs to change still further. Experience-based learning in workplaces and other forms of education-business partnership enrich the learning process, and help young people to engage at an earlier age in the interaction between learning and work which is the essence of lifelong learning.⁵⁶ They need to be extended, with stronger employer commitment. This could be linked to other changes in schools, mirroring those in the world of work: more ‘portfolio’ teachers combining teaching with other work roles, more ‘contracting out’ of parts of the curriculum to business and industry, more use of information technology for independent learning, more opportunities for problem-solving projects involving students working in supervised teams in varied settings, and more flexi-time arrangements that give teachers and students a stronger sense of control and reduce the sense of oppressive routine and predictability.⁵⁷

The RSA has suggested that lifelong learning should be viewed as comprising three overlapping stages: *foundation* (up to age 16), instilling the habit of learning; *formation* (ages 14–21), developing workplace readiness; and *continuation* (age 18+), based on independent learning.⁵⁸ A more flexible learning system constructed along these lines will provide a dynamic counterpart to the new more flexible work system, and enable individuals to develop progressive career pathways intertwining the two.

A national qualifications framework

Within the new model of learning required by the new models of work, the role of accreditation is critical. If individuals are to move more regularly between different work organisations, their learning must be accredited in ways which makes it portable.

This means accreditation not only of formal learning, but also of informal learning, including learning in the workplace. Individuals who are responsible for their own career development need to be assured that at the end of any work contract, they will be more employable and marketable rather than less. Accordingly, they increasingly need to demand that the learning they have acquired in the course of the contract is accredited, so that its value is recognised by other possible employers. This could be the basis of a new mutually beneficial 'psychological contract' focused around employability rather than secure employment.

The main framework currently being developed for such accreditation is the structure of National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications. It is competence-based: the process by which the individual reaches this competence is not defined. The framework is designed to be comprehensive, covering all work-related learning and to facilitate movement between as well as within particular occupations.⁵⁹ Work has also been done to extend the framework to cover competences acquired through unpaid work in the home and the community.

The system of NVQs/SVQs is in many respects an important move in the right direction. Its competence-based approach is, however, widely criticised for being narrowly behaviourist in nature and not paying sufficient attention to underpinning knowledge and theory.⁶⁰ This could be a particularly significant limitation at higher occupational levels, where progress is still at an early stage.⁶¹

Meanwhile, the post-compulsory education system is increasingly developing credit and accumulation and transfer systems (CATS) which are designed to enable students to move more easily between different courses and institutions. The pace of such development is still uneven, with different credit 'tariff' systems being used by different institutions, with a continuing divide between the systems used within further and higher education respectively, and with some institutions being more concerned with intra-rather than inter-institutional mobility.⁶²

In principle, the roles of NVQs/SVQs and of CATS are complementary. The criticisms of NVQs/SVQs for neglecting knowledge and theory are matched by criticisms of educational courses accredited in

CATS schemes for neglecting skills (in particular, transferable core skills). Effective learning experiences are likely to need to encompass attention to knowledge/theory *and* skills, though in varying balance: *both* need to be accredited. Whether this is based on a system of dual accreditation of single learning experiences, or on an integrated accreditation system, is open to debate. An initial step towards bringing the two together would be to seek to base CATS schemes on learning outcomes rather than on inputs (length of study) as at present.

Whichever approach is adopted, the new model of career requires an integrated qualifications framework in which the respective strengths of the NVQ/SVQ and CATS systems are sustained, their limitations ameliorated, and their connections strengthened. Such a framework will provide a clear, comprehensible and widely recognised climbing-frame for career development for all. Individuals' progress through the frame would be recorded in a lifelong Personal Record of Achievement. Schools should then be seen as providing young people not with life-sentences based on terminal assessments, but with their initial foothold within the frame.

Action is also needed on the demand side to make the resulting structure the basis for a 'licence to practise' in work roles. At present, such requirements exist in Britain only within occupations dominated by strong professional associations (e.g. medicine, the law, architecture, accountancy) and within some skilled trades (e.g. welding, electrical work). Such professional licensing could be extended to other occupational groups, as in Germany, both by legislation and by other forms of pressure and encouragement. It could be extended by requiring evidence of continuing professional development to maintain one's licence. The result would be greater protection of the consumer through product and service quality, plus a stronger incentive for individual career development.

Lifelong access to career guidance

If careers are to become both more normal and more complicated, the need for career guidance will grow accordingly.

In the past, the role of career guidance has been limited. The destiny of individuals in education and employment has been determined largely by selection processes. Career guidance has been a limited switch-mechanism to fine-tune the passage from one system to the other, concentrated around the transition from full-time education to employment. In practice, the two systems have usually been so well synchronised that guidance services have not had too much to do. They have been marginal and low-status.

Now, however, their role is moving centre-stage. If individuals are to take responsibility for their career development, career guidance is critical, in three respects: in helping individuals to clarify and articulate their aims and aspirations; in ensuring that their decisions are informed in relation to the needs of the labour market; and in empowering individuals in their negotiations with employers and other purchasers of their services. Concentrating such guidance resources at the entry-point to employment is no longer adequate. Careers are now based not on single decision points, but on a long series of iterative decisions made throughout people's lives. Guidance needs to be available at all these decision points.

This means that a national strategy is required for lifelong access to guidance in support of lifelong career development, for all.⁶³ No single agency can deliver what is needed.

A three-pronged strategy is required:

- guidance as an integral part of all educational provision;
- guidance as an integral part of all employment provision; and
- continuous access to independent guidance from a neutral base.

All three need to be supported by strong and clear quality standards.⁶⁴

The concept of career guidance as an integral part of education has two facets. The first is the role of compulsory schooling in laying the foundations for lifelong career development. This attaches particular importance to careers education within the curriculum, designed to

develop competence in career self-management: the skills, knowledge and attitudes which will enable young people to make and implement career decisions both immediately and in the future. This has traditionally been a marginal part of a curriculum dominated by academic subjects. Career management now needs to be added to Sir Ron Dearing's list of 'key skills'⁶⁵ and viewed as the core of a new curriculum for preparing students for lifelong learning.

The second facet is that all educational provision should provide regular opportunities for students to relate what they are learning to their future career development. This has implications for the curriculum itself. It also requires tutorial support, and specialist guidance services within the institution. The importance attached to such services is likely to grow as course structures become more flexible, with the development of modular courses and systems of credit accumulation and transfer.

A particularly significant development both in schools and in further and higher education is the growing practice of encouraging students to engage in regular recording of achievement and action planning. Students in an increasing number of institutions are being asked, every few months, to review their learning experiences, inside and outside the formal curriculum, and to define the skills and competencies acquired; they are also being asked to review their long-term goals, their short-term learning objectives, and ways of achieving these objectives. This is of value in its own right; it also helps to develop and support the skills of reviewing and of planning which are crucial to career self-management.

Within employment, too, individuals are increasingly being given opportunities to review their progress and their future plans – either within appraisal systems, or through parallel systems of development reviews. In addition, a growing number of organisations are introducing other systems to support career self-management: career planning workshops, assessment centres, career resource centres, mentoring systems, and the like. Such systems tend, however, to be more common in large than in small and medium-sized organisations.

The potential advantages of embedding career guidance within education and employment are two-fold. First, such organisations have

more continuous contacts with individuals based within them, and so are able to deliver more substantial and sustained support than any external service can do. In particular, through regular development reviews, they are able to deliver the career equivalent of the dental check-up. Second, they are in a stronger position to respond to individuals' needs and demands, as revealed through the guidance process.⁶⁶ Guidance can thus not only help individuals to choose between the opportunities already available, but also encourage providers to develop new opportunities to meet individuals' preferences and requirements.

But guidance within education and within employment also share common limitations. First, they do not cover everyone: many people spend significant parts of their lives outside education and employment structures – because they are unemployed, for example, or engaged in child-rearing. Second, guidance services within organisations do not always have a sufficiently broad view of opportunities outside that organisation. Third, the organisation can have a vested interest in the outcomes of the individual's decision, which can make it difficult to provide guidance that is genuinely impartial. Schools with sixth-forms, for instance, are rewarded financially if their students stay on beyond the age of 16: some are tempted to bias their guidance in favour of their own offerings at the expense of the opportunities available elsewhere. Employers, too, may be reluctant to encourage valued employees to explore opportunities in other organisations.

For these reasons, individuals also need access to a broader and more impartial perspective which a neutral career guidance service can bring. Some will be able to gain sufficient help and support from friends and relatives. Many, however, will need access to a professional service, with professional counselling skills and access to high-quality information.

For young people (plus some adults involved in further education), free access to such a service – the Careers Service – is assured by statute. The Careers Service has traditionally been a low-status operation, run by Local Education Authorities. Under legislation passed in 1994, contracts to run the service in specified localities have been offered on competitive tender. It is too early to determine whether this will produce a higher-quality and more innovative service, or result in

lowering of professional standards and fragmentation of professional collaboration.

For most adults, however, there is no such provision. Instead there is a patchwork of public guidance services, mostly without any continuity of funding, plus an Employment Service in which guidance is confusingly linked to punitive tests of benefit entitlement for the unemployed. There is also a private sector limited to certain market niches (particularly outplacement counselling funded by employers).

The most urgent policy need is a national strategy for guidance for adults. An approach which is attracting growing support is based on a two-stage model.⁶⁷ The *foundation* provision – parallel in some respects with the ‘one-stop shops’ being developed in the USA – would be available free of charge to all.

It would comprise a national telephone helpline, plus open-access information centres in every sizeable town and city, with ‘satellites’ in rural areas. These centres would offer high-quality information, supported by brief ‘diagnostic guidance’ interventions designed to identify guidance needs for which further provision might be needed. This *enhanced* provision – counselling interviews, psychometric testing, etc. – would be available from a range of accredited providers within both the public and private sectors, and would be costed: those able to pay would be expected to do so, perhaps from their individual learning accounts (see earlier in this section); public funding would be targeted at groups where the ability to pay was low and/or the public interest in take-up was high (notably the unemployed, women returners, and the low-waged).

To bring together these various strands of guidance provision within a coherent strategic framework, strong co-ordinating structures are needed. At national level, the new National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance is a promising development, bringing together as it does the major employer organisations, and guidance professional organisations, with observers from the relevant government departments. Strategic frameworks for lifelong access to guidance are also needed at regional and local levels, with Training and Enterprise Councils potentially playing a key role.

The changing concept of career has considerable implications not only for the structure of guidance delivery, but also for its processes. Urgent consideration needs to be given to, for example, the opportunities for global access to information and contacts offered by the Internet, and its relationship to face-to-face guidance services. Further, it seems likely that there will be a growing need for stronger links between career guidance and financial guidance.

Stronger intermediary organisations between individuals and employers

Independent guidance services are one kind of intermediary organisation between individuals and employers. But there are also other such organisations which can support people and act as brokers in their relationships with employers.

The main social institutions which now exist to provide such support to individuals at present are professional associations and trade unions. Their origins lay in the medieval guilds, providing support for craftsmen and artisans. The professional associations have developed strong regulation and certification functions. Unions have tended to be pre-occupied with collective bargaining, especially regarding wages, but this role is in decline with the 'downsizing' of large organisations, the growth of small and medium-sized organisations, and the increase in individual contracting: as a result, union membership is in decline too.

Both professional associations and unions now need to pay more attention to supporting individual career development within a flexible labour market. This requires greater attention to services to individual members, including offering professional development and career guidance, and possibly acting as agents and advocates for individuals in their negotiations with employers. Use of commercial agents is already common in fields like sports and the arts where short-term contracting is well-established: professional associations and unions could take on roles of this kind as the practice is extended elsewhere.

The concern of such organisations should be more with maintaining their members' employability than with seeking to protect them in

their existing jobs; their role should be heightened rather than weakened when their members experience unemployment. Where the collective bargaining role of unions survives, it should include attention to employers' career management practices, and pay more attention to the procedural equity of the individual contracting process than to pursuing common outcomes.⁶⁸ It may be that the roles of professional associations and unions in these various respects will increasingly blur into one another.

There also appears to be a growing role for 'deployers'⁶⁹ – firms with a long-term relationship with individuals which deploy their labour to others. The largest example is Manpower, which is now one of the biggest 'employers' in the UK. It used to be mainly a 'temp' agency for casual workers and students, but is now increasingly a long-term deployer of career professionals. It acts as a broker between employers and individuals; it is also an accredited Investor in People, committed to offering continuing training to all the individuals on its books. Smaller 'deployers' are now growing up in a wide variety of more specific fields: organisations like LabStaff (qualified scientific workers) and Executives on Assignment. Demos' proposal of 'Employee Mutuals' as a 21st-century version of the trade union⁷⁰ suggests one way in which these might evolve.

Other intermediary organisations with increasingly significant roles include commercial agents (especially if professional associations and unions do not adopt the agent role), voluntary organisations representing particular client groups (e.g. the National Council for One-Parent Families), self-help groups, and networks (e.g. the Women Returners' Network). The social role of such institutions needs recognition from government, and – where appropriate – support.

More flexible financial-support structures

The final plank is financial: a reframed system of welfare. The welfare state that emerged after the Second World War was based on a series of assumptions about the family, work and the life-cycle. The family was assumed to combine a full-time stably-employed male wage-earner, with a wife primarily devoted to her work within the home. It was further

assumed that their life-cycles were orderly, standardized and predictable, that male employment was assured, and that the welfare state could therefore concentrate on childhood (schooling) and old age (pensions), being largely passive during the active middle part of the life-cycle.⁷¹

All of these assumptions are now in question. Traditional gender divisions are being revolutionised. Women are now spending much longer periods in the labour force, with shorter gaps for child-rearing. Young people are entering the labour force later, and taking longer to secure an independent foothold within it. Dislocation and significant changes in mid-career are more common. Some older workers are disengaging more gradually from full-time employment.⁷²

The danger is that these changes place an ever-greater burden on the welfare system, with longer periods of dependency and shorter periods of contribution. This is already producing a fiscal crisis in which the basic tenets of welfare as a basis for social equity and citizenship are challenged, and levels of support eroded. Spending on social protection (health, pensions, unemployment benefits, income support) is now lower in the UK than in most other OECD countries.⁷³ Yet Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor of the Exchequer, has recognised the increased importance of the welfare system in a flexible labour market:

'A strong welfare state can complement, not hinder, more flexible markets by reducing fear of change and opposition to it. These fears provide a fertile breeding ground for protectionist sentiment and resistance to change. Not only adequate state welfare provision but a whole range of other social policies should alleviate such fears, and offer a sense of security in a world where retraining and changes of job are becoming more necessary events in most people's working lives.'⁷⁴

There are various ways of guaranteeing the security that might reduce fear of change, so that leaving a job would not be experienced as a trauma but rather as an opportunity.

One answer has been produced by Frank Field MP. He proposes a new insurance system designed to offer income security in a world of growing labour-market flexibility: this would include bringing the currently excluded part-time workers within the insurance scheme, changing the rigid contribution conditions of set years to a flexible formula, and introducing earnings-related benefits for earnings-related contributions. Of particular interest for our present concern is the notion that income support should be transferred into a 'proactive opportunities agency', with all non-pension claimants being expected to draw up career plans outlining what they want to do and achieve during the rest of their working lives.⁷⁵ If the operation of such an agency could match its aspiration, the social-security system could provide not just a secure base but a launching-pad.

A more radical alternative is to collapse the present tax and social-benefits systems into a basic citizen's income, received as a right by everyone. This would enable people to make flexible choices about the extent of paid employment in which they engage. The industrial-era concept of unemployment⁷⁶ would disappear. With it would go poverty traps and the pressures to squeeze economic activities into the black economy. More flexible patterns of work would be positively encouraged rather than – as at present – discouraged. The concept has appeal both to the political left, because it provides an egalitarian base, and to the right, because it liberates the market.⁷⁷

The main objections to the citizen's income are three-fold. The first is fiscal: the costs of the level at which it would need to be set in order to provide the basis for a satisfactory quality of life. After exhaustive costings of alternative models, Hermione Parker concluded that it is not politically realistic to move immediately to a full citizen's income, but that it could be phased in by starting with a partial scheme.⁷⁸ The second objection is political: that a basic income would not of itself solve the problems of social exclusion, but might erode the political will to do anything further to address such problems. Certainly there would be a need for further measures to transform, for example, the infrastructure of poor neighbourhoods in terms of resources, housing, education and economic opportunities. The third objection is ethical: that by providing

income without duties, the basic income undermines the concept of reciprocal obligation which is the traditional basis of active citizenship.⁷⁹ It would, however, at least recognise that social contribution can take a variety of forms other than paid employment; it would also be preferable to the present benefit system, which provides income only so long as people can demonstrate that they are doing little or nothing of social value.

To those who regard the ethical objection as decisive, the debate moves to some form of 'work test'. Taken to its logical conclusion, it leads to the notion of replacing current benefit systems with a 'workfare' scheme, in which unemployment benefits are only paid to those who engage in approved forms of work. The administrative costs of such schemes are considerable, and there are difficulties in ensuring that they do not undermine the operations of the market. They also, if too narrowly drawn, tend to have a stigmatising effect, associated with 'make-work' rather than 'real work'. If however the boundaries of what is regarded as acceptable social contribution are broadened to include voluntary work, childcare, and education and training – as suggested by the Borrie Commission's concept of a 'participation income'⁸⁰ – this danger is more easily avoided, although of course the cost rises. It then becomes a matter of balancing the costs of policing such a system – and the invasion of individual dignity which such policing systems can involve – against the benefits of maintaining an assurance of social obligation.

In the meantime, steps need to be taken to devise new ways of coping with the effect of more flexible and discontinuous career patterns on mortgages, pensions, and private health-care insurance. The great majority of those whose homes are repossessed because of mortgage default are people who have lost their job, whose earnings have fallen, or whose businesses have failed.⁸¹ Wider use of payment 'holidays' and similar devices is needed to help mortgage payers to schedule their payments in line with their fluctuating career commitments, including helping them through temporary loss of work or the birth of children. Again, provision for pensions and private health care tends at present to be based on assumptions of continuous employment, including

significant employer contributions: more attention is needed to adapting such arrangements to the new realities.

All of these policies involve costs: they imply that everyone will pay more during their periods in work to finance their more frequent periods out of work. Given the uncertainties involved, it is highly unlikely that people will be able to purchase this kind of insurance and security through the market.

Conclusion

The rhetoric that individuals are now responsible for their careers is pervasive. But it is also misleading. There is much to be celebrated about a labour market that gives people more choices and opportunities. But for these to be experienced as empowering rather than disabling, there need to be support structures to enable people in accessing information, to develop their skills and qualities, and to finance more frequent periods without a steady income.

Some of these should continue to be provided by employers: appropriate forms of regulation and encouragement are needed to ensure that employers play their role. But more support needs to go directly to the individual.

In particular, this report has argued, six steps need to be taken:

1. To strengthen incentives to lifelong learning, including individual learning accounts to which government, employers and individuals would all contribute.
2. To develop a more flexible and responsive learning system, making more creative use of information technology, and interweaving learning with work on a lifelong basis.
3. To develop an integrated national qualifications framework, covering both knowledge and skills, to provide the climbing-frame for flexible and portable career development.

4. To assure lifelong access to career guidance, to support individuals in regularly reviewing and planning their career development.
5. To recognise the increasingly important supportive role of other intermediary organisations between individuals and employers, including professional associations, trade unions, commercial agents, voluntary organisations, self-help groups, and networks of various kinds.
6. To develop new financial-support structures, whether through insurance or basic citizen's income schemes, so as to provide a base of security on which flexible careers can be built.

Each complements and supports the others. Together, they provide a prospectus for a new era.

Flexible labour markets could make it possible for more individuals to achieve more of their potential than in the past. But they will only do so if they are linked to a new concept of career, available to all. The self-build career is a desirable goal.

But at present its foundations are chronically inadequate for a large proportion of Britain's population. Strengthening these foundations is one of the most pressing tasks for public policy as we enter the new millennium.

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