

DEVELOPING CAREER TRAJECTORIES IN ENGLAND: THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE

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Foreword

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

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance by tracking the career trajectories of research participants and establish the role that guidance has played in this process. Fifty in-depth case studies were initially completed (December, 2003 to March, 2004). Analyses of these data are presented in the first report¹. 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 study² interview. Forty-five were successfully interviewed and the second report³ was based on follow-up findings relating to their career progression, reflections on the guidance interview, future plans and next steps.

This third report is based on data collected from the 36 clients who were successfully contacted two years after the case study interview (three years into the study). It focuses on how the career trajectories of participants in England are developing. In particular, it highlights barriers and influences, the changing reflections on the guidance interview, together with client views of their career choices and decisions.

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

² 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'.

³ For the full text of the second report: Bimrose, J., Barnes, S-A., and Hughes, D. (2005) *Effective Guidance One Year On: Evidence From Longitudinal Case Studies in England*, DfES/Warwick Institute for Employment Research. Available online: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/bydate/2005/egreportoct05.pdf>

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Our sincere thanks go to all 36 clients who gave up their time to talk to us again – some of whom took the initiative and contacted us with their change of contact details. Without their ongoing help, interest and co-operation, this study would not be possible.

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

- **Institute for Employment Research (IER)** at the University of Warwick, project managed and took a central role in the fieldwork, data management and data analysis. IER led on the writing of the report.
Dr. Jenny Bimrose – Principal Research Fellow and Project Manager
Dr. Sally-Anne Barnes – Research Fellow
Dr. Michael Orton – Senior Research Fellow
- **Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS)** at the University of Derby assisted with fieldwork and data analysis. CeGS has also contributed to the report.
Deirdre Hughes – University Reader in Guidance Studies and Director of CeGS
Denise Smith – Research Associate
Irene Krechowicka – Research Associate
- **National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC)** assisted with the field research.
Lesley Haughton – Fellow

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

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Executive summary

Please note: throughout this report, the guidance interview that clients received as part of the initial, in-depth case study research investigation 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 two years on is referred to as the 'second follow-up' interview.

1. The second year of follow-up in this longitudinal study has met its objectives, capturing rich data that illustrate the unfolding **career trajectories of participants** and provides **further evidence of the positive impacts of guidance** (complementing evidence collected during the first and second phases of research).

2. The **attrition rate for research participants continues to be low**, with 36 (80%) of the 45 clients who were interviewed for the one year on follow-ups now also interviewed for the two years on phase of follow-up interviews. This represents a 72% follow-up rate of the original sample of 50 participants.

3. The study has now successfully tracked the achievements and aspirations of participants for three consecutive years, with the data collected providing rich insights into unfolding **career trajectories, career decision-making styles and approaches to career management**.

4. Data indicate that the **qualification level of clients has risen over the last two years**. Thirty-three percent of clients (n=12) have increased their highest qualification level by 1 level or more, with the majority increasing by 1 or 2 levels (75%, n=9).

5. 72% (n=26) of the 36 clients successfully contacted **still regarded their guidance interview as useful**. However, 14% (n=5) of clients are now unsure of its usefulness, whilst 14% (n=5) of clients could no longer recollect the guidance they had received. The one client who had not found their case study interview useful recognised, two years on, that some aspects had proved to be of some value.

6. Clients found **guidance useful when it:** provided valuable insights; helped to focus ideas; improved self-confidence, provided opportunities to reflect and gave access to expert information.

7. **Just over half of clients** stated that they would consider **further guidance** in the future.

8. Clients identified **three barriers** which are **impeding their career progression**. These are: ill health; local labour markets and childcare commitments.

9. About **one third of clients** regarded the need to invest in their **human capital development** as essential in the pursuance of longer term career goals.

10. The distinguishing feature of the career trajectories of sixteen of the clients was the career changes they had made in the two years since their case study interview and more particularly, how these changes had occurred. **Two types of career changers** were identified. One group approached career change proactively, being **strategic** in the way they managed their career change, taking time to plan their next step. The second group was more reactive, taking chances that came along in a somewhat **opportunistic** way.

11. Four distinct **career decision-making styles** have emerged from the data: **evaluative, strategic, opportunistic** and **aspirational**.

12. Clients were able to identify **career management competencies** that have assisted their career development, attributing their acquisition to the guidance practitioners with whom they had worked.

1. Introduction

1.1 Two years on

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

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

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

Objectives were to:

- track the career progress of clients since the year one follow-up interview;
- determine whether progress actually achieved was indicated at their year one follow-up interview;
- investigate the clients' perceptions of their initial case study guidance interview;
- evaluate the extent to which action plans agreed in the case study interview have been implemented (and/or continue to be implemented); and
- explore the nature and value of any follow-up guidance received.

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

Of the original 50 clients, 45 were successfully contacted and interviewed by telephone one year after the case study interview, during the period October, 2004 – March, 2005. Two years on, 36 clients were interviewed by telephone about their career progression

over the previous year. Findings from this phase of investigation are presented in this report.

1.2 Key findings from the initial phase of study

In any study of effective guidance, it is essential to establish how 'effectiveness' is being defined and from whose point of view. In this study, 'effectiveness' has been defined from the perspective of the clients receiving guidance – what, exactly, did they find useful about their guidance, if anything at all? A key challenge for this study is to capture these data not only immediately after the case study interview under scrutiny, but in the four years following the guidance intervention. Only then will it be possible to assess whether the impact of guidance on clients, from their perspective, diminishes, increases or remains the same over time.

Immediately after the event, the majority (98%, n=49) of the original participants evaluated their case study guidance interview as 'useful'. These clients regarded their guidance positively because it had: provided challenge and direction; given access to relevant resources; could be accessed over a period of time; brought about positive change(s); and provided support and safety. In addition to recording the perceptions of clients about the usefulness of their guidance intervention, data gathered during the first phase of investigation permitted a typology of the guidance interview to be generated from practitioner interventions across the forty-nine interviews evaluated as 'useful' by clients. Four discrete categories of activities emerged from a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts. These were: building a working alliance; exploring potential; identifying options and strategies; plus ending and following-through. Each category comprises between three and six sub-sets of activities (forty in total). Not all activities of guidance are evident across all interviews, nor did any particular combination or sequence emerge.

Initial data analysis has also highlighted how some factors that influence the efficacy of the guidance process come from outside the immediate boundaries of the interview itself (e.g. availability of different types of resources, like time, space, access to ICT, etc.). Indeed, variations in the professional contexts represented in this study, within which the guidance was delivered, were found to be multidimensional, with the circumstances in which much guidance took place often unpredictable (e.g. whether a suitable interview room was available at the time it was needed). Neither this, nor any other evaluation of in-depth guidance, can therefore be regarded as comparing like with like.

The professional contexts in which the case studies have been carried out included: further education; higher education; charitable/voluntary organisations; adult guidance organisations; and the workplace. A comparative analysis of data collected on the delivery contexts revealed considerable diversity, including a range of organisational settings. All participating organisations operated to some type of external and/or internal quality standards and the majority had in-service training support for practitioners. The majority of practitioners (78%, n=39) who participated in the research held a specialist qualification (specifically a Qualification in Careers Guidance, Diploma in Careers Guidance, Certificate in Careers Guidance or an NVQ Level 4 work-based qualification in guidance). Less than a quarter of practitioners (22%, n=11) held an NVQ Level 3 work-based qualification in guidance or had no careers guidance related qualifications. Many of the practitioners had been professionally active for over ten years and had gained their experience across varied contexts.

1.3 Key findings from the one year on follow-up interviews

The first year of follow-ups in this longitudinal study documented further evidence of the positive impacts of guidance (which complemented evidence collected during the initial stage of research). The attrition rate for participants was extremely low, with 45 of the original 50 clients (90%) successfully followed up one year after their case study interview.

The follow-up interviews, one year on, tracked the achievements and aspirations of clients, providing rich insights into contrasting career trajectories. It was found that guidance had acted as a catalyst for positive change, even where agreed action had not been implemented or advice followed. Seventy eight per cent (n=35) of clients who were followed-up felt that guidance had resulted in direct and positive change (such as: a change in their situation, thinking, and/or future plans; being pointed in the right direction; given alternative options/ideas to consider; or had ideas affirmed). Thirty-one per cent (n=14) of clients felt guidance had resulted in indirect positive change (such as: increased confidence or motivation).

One year on, over half of the clients (53%, n=24) were improving their occupational competence, by engaging with education or training. They were involved variously with up-skilling, re-skilling or training for re-entry to the labour market. Four barriers to career progression were identified, which had prevented clients from implementing the action

plans agreed during the case study interview. These comprised: financial constraints; childcare commitments; health issues and local labour market conditions.

Many clients who had recently completed higher education were experiencing prolonged transitions into the labour market. They were using various strategies to progress their careers, including testing out various options, 'buying time' and actively trying to clarify values.

One year on, 87% (n=39) of clients still regarded their guidance as 'useful', whilst 11% (n=5) were less sure of its value. One client still felt that her guidance had been of no value. Five strong themes emerged from the data indicating how clients found their guidance useful when it: gave access to specialist information; reduced confusion; motivated or provided new insights; confirmed ideas and built confidence.

Findings from this research emphasise the importance of incorporating the concept of 'distance travelled' by the client in evaluations of the impact of guidance. Even where no direct relationship was found between agreed action and subsequent career progress, guidance was found to have played a crucial role. Career transitions are often complex and lengthy, with quantifiable outcomes (like placement into education, training or employment) alone inadequate indicators of whether a client has, actually, made progress towards a longer term career destination.

1.4 Building on the initial findings

This third year of investigation builds on findings from the initial case study interview and the first phase of follow-up by continuing to focus on the career progression of clients, their perception of guidance received and its role in their career development. Two years on, clients were asked to assess: the usefulness of the guidance they had received in the light of developments over the past two years; the type of support, if any, they had received (and from whom); the influences and circumstance affecting their decisions and choices over the last year (see Appendix 1).

1.5 Building and maintaining relationships with clients

Fostering a relationship between the researcher and their subjects is regarded as essential for gaining access to the subjective experience of participants⁴. Researchers followed up and interviewed the same clients as the previous year 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. Although some clients, initially, had no recollection of the initial guidance interview at which they met the researcher, a few prompts were sufficient to jog memories.

As preparation, researchers reviewed the transcripts of the case study guidance interview and the one year on follow-up interviews, together with the interview summaries. This ensured that researchers had familiarised themselves with each of their clients' history and activities over the last two years since their case study interview. Clients seemed to appreciate the personal details that researchers were able to recall, such as asking how their house renovations were going and how their children were getting on. Attending to these specific client details assisted in not only building and maintaining the client-researcher relationship, but also in establishing trust and helping clients feel comfortable. Similar to the one year on follow-up interviews, clients were pleased, often eager, to talk to researchers about their progress and activities over the previous year.

Building and maintaining relationships with clients also involved, as in the first year of follow-up interviews, researchers responding to clients requests for help. In qualitative research, maintaining the boundary between research and intervention can be challenging. 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 participants⁵. A caring relationship between the researcher and

⁴ 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 a symposium on Constructivism and Vocational Psychology at the Society for Vocational Psychology's 7th Biennial Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia.

⁵ Haverkamp, B.E. (2005) 'Ethical perspectives on qualitative research in applied psychology', *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, pp.146-155.

the research participant is given priority⁶. In this research, helpful responses to clients included: offering information on where to get further help (such as informing clients of different organisations offering guidance and encouraging clients to return to the original source of guidance); offering information on funding for courses; and reinforcing or supporting a client's identity and ideas. This occurred in 12 (33%) interviews.

1.6 What next?

Thirty-five of the 36 clients who participated in the first phase follow-up gave their permission to be followed up in a year. This fourth phase of the research (2006-2007), involving the third year of follow-up after the initial case study will, once more, involve telephone interviews with these clients. Client progress will continue to be tracked and issues that have emerged from the analysis of data so far will be further investigated. Specifically, the third year follow-up will probe: career progression and future plans; views on progression and perceived barriers; the nature of any gains that clients may have made in developing their knowledge, skills and experiences; and further support, both received and required. A fourth report, detailing findings from the third year of follow-up, will be produced in the autumn of 2007.

1.7 Report structure

In addition to this first section, the report contains a further five, including the conclusions from the study. Section two outlines the follow-up methodology used for the second phase of follow-up. This includes a summary of the approach taken to the analysis of data, details of response rates and demographic data. The particular focus of this section is on the changes to the qualification levels of clients that have been documented over the period of this study, together with any changes in the employment status of the clients.

⁶ 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 a symposium on Constructivism and Vocational Psychology at the Society for Vocational Psychology's 7th Biennial Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia.

The third section presents an analysis of the career trajectories of the 36 clients who participated in this follow-up. From this analysis, three descriptors of client situations three years after the case study interview are identified and typologies of behavioural responses to these situations presented. These are described as the career disengaged; career investors; and career changers.

Section four details client perceptions of their guidance, two years after the event. It also examines: influences on the clients' career progression; reflections on any further guidance received (since their case study); and considers any additional support required.

Managing career change is the theme of the fifth section of this report. The different types of change experience by clients over the three year period (2003/04, 2004/05, 2005/06) are outlined and the career decision-making styles of clients detailed. Additionally, career management competencies, together with career management styles that have emerged from the data are explored.

Conclusions to the third phase of this longitudinal study are presented in section 6.

2. Methodology: follow-up of clients two years on

Of the 45 clients who were interviewed one year after the case study interview featured in the first report, 37 were successfully contacted. Details for eight of the clients were no longer valid. Only one of those contacted did not wish to continue her participation in the study, due to personal circumstances. Thirty-six clients, therefore, agreed to be interviewed by telephone two years on. This section discusses methods used to contact the clients, response rates and details (briefly) the approach taken to the analysis of the transcripts. In addition, characteristics of clients contacted are presented as well as an analysis of changes in client qualification levels and employment status since their case study guidance interview in 2003/04.

The field research team for the second year of follow-ups comprised five of the eight researchers who originally undertook data collection for the initial case studies. These were the same researchers who undertook the first phase of follow-ups, thus ensuring a degree of continuity for clients. All members of the research team are experienced, offering expertise in conducting in-depth interviews. Three are also experienced guidance practitioners.

2.1 Developing the interview proforma

Key issues and themes drawn from the first year of follow-up interviews were used to inform the interview proforma for the third phase of study (see Appendix 1). This comprised questions based on the following framework of topics:

- current situation and changes since the first year of follow-up;
- career development and progress over the last 12 months;
- initial guidance interview;
- further guidance;
- plans for the next year; and
- the influence of guidance on career progression.

2.2 Contacting clients and response rates

Thirty-six of the 45 clients interviewed last year were followed up. A variety of methods were used to establish contact. Specifically:

- between 1 and 46 attempts to make contact by telephone were made;
- 29 telephone messages were left;

- 13 emails and 10 letters were sent.

The length of telephone interviews ranged from (approximately) 4 to 29 minutes, with the average length just over 16 minutes. As previously, researchers received a positive response. The majority of clients were keen to share their experiences, discuss their progress over the last 12 months and reflect on their future plans. Where clients requested initial contact by email, this proved effective.

The ethical principle of 'informed consent' remains at the heart of the process of involving participants in this research study. All clients had previously given permission to be contacted and in 25 cases, the follow-up interview took place immediately, during the first contact from the researcher. In 10 cases the researcher agreed to call back at a more convenient time.

In one exceptional case the researcher found it relatively easy to contact the client initially, though it took three calls to book an appointment for the interview. Circumstances conspired against the interview taking place, with the client agreeing to be contacted later in the year. In the event, the researcher made no less than 46 calls before managing to complete the interview. Because of a significant change in personal circumstances, this client has now withdrawn from the study, unable to commit the time.

Contact details for six clients proved to be invalid. Telephones had been disconnected, email addresses were out-dated or clients had moved with no forwarding address provided. As in the previous year, varied methods were used to obtain current details including: making contact with guidance practitioners, contacting parents and/or using directory enquires. These methods were, again, successful in ensuring a low attrition rate. In two cases, messages were left with a relative of the client, but clients did not return the call.

Only once did a client decline to participate in the study.

Thirty-six of the 50 clients who originally participated in the in-depth case studies were successfully contacted two years on, achieving an overall response rate of 72% (see Table 1, below). The clients who had had their case study interview either within a private organisation or funded by their workplace were all successfully contacted. Similarly, all clients from higher education were successfully contacted and interviewed for the 2 year follow-up. A good response rate was also achieved from clients who had

had the case study interview in a Connexions, Information, Advice and Guidance Partnership (IAGP) or Jobcentre Plus context. However, high attrition rates occurred for those case studies recorded in the further education context and the community/outreach guidance and not-for-profit organisational context (see Table 1). From available data, it is not possible to discern reasons for the high drop-out from these two contexts.

Table 1 Response rates by context for year 1 and year 2 follow-ups

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

2.3 Approach to the analysis

The analysis presented in this report is based on the follow-up interviews with the 36 clients who were successfully contacted two years on from the case study interview. Whilst an agreed pro-forma (see Appendix 1) provided some structure for these interviews, clients were encouraged to talk freely about their career progress and career decisions.

As in previous years, the interviews were transcribed and analysed using QSR NVivo 2, a qualitative data analysis software package⁷. The text was categorised using codes drawn inductively from the text. These codes were developed by one researcher and moderated independently by two other researchers for accuracy (see Appendix 2). This process of analysis, and validation, permitted the identification of themes, as they emerged from the data. Descriptors of client responses to their circumstances were derived from emergent themes and relate to career change, career decision-making styles and career management competences. These are more fully discussed in sections 3 and 5 below. At this stage of the research process, these descriptors are tentative, with the fourth and fifth phases of the study providing opportunities for further investigation.

Clients were also asked about their highest qualification and employment status, so changes that have occurred since the case study interview could be tracked (see sections 2.5 and 2.6 respectively).

2.4 Characteristics of clients successfully contacted two years on

Of the 36 clients successfully contacted two years on from the case study interview, 67% are female (n=24) and 33% are male (n=12). The initial client population participating in the study consisted of 66% female (n=33) and 34% male (n=17). Characteristics of those clients successfully contacted for the second 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.

Over half (61%, n=22) of the clients successfully contacted were aged between 18 and 29 years. Across all contexts, 22% of clients were aged 30-39 years (n=8), 8% 40-49 years (n=3) and 8% were aged 50-59 years (n=3). Of those clients successfully contacted two years on, 78% (n=28) self-reported their ethnic origin as 'White' or as 'White' with a nationality assigned. Six clients (17%) defined themselves as 'British' or 'English'. Only two of the four female clients (6%) who defined themselves variously from an ethnic minority group (including 'Black British' and 'Half Cast' (50% Nigerian and 50% White)) were successfully contacted two years on. Six (17%) of the initial seven clients self-reporting a disability were successfully contacted two years on.

⁷ For further information on this package see Appendix 13 of the first report.

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

Client characteristics	Organisational context												Total			
	Connexions, IAGP & Jobcentre Plus			Higher Education			Further Education			Community/outreach guidance & not-for-profit organisations				Private organisations & workplace guidance		
	Male	Female	Total n=10	Male	Female	Total n=9	Male	Female	Total n=4	Male	Female	Total n=5		Male	Female	Total n=8
Age																
18-29	2	4	6	2	6	8	1	2	3	1	1	2		3	3	22
30-39	1	2	3	1		1				1		1	1	2	3	8
40-49											1	1	1	1	2	3
50-59		1	1					1	1	1		1				3
60+																0
Total	3	7	10	3	6	9	1	3	4	3	2	5	2	6	8	36
Ethnic Origin																
White UK		1		1	1	2	1		1							3
White British	2	2		2	3	5		1	1	1	1	2	1	3	4	12
White English					1	1										1
White European		1											1		1	1
White		1			1	1		1	1		1	1		1	1	4
British	1	1						1	1	1		1				2
English		1								1		1				1
British Caribbean																0
Black Caribbean																0
Black British														1	1	1
Phillipine																
* 'Half caste' (Nigerian/White)														1	1	1
Total	3	7	10	3	6	9	1	3	4	3	2	5	2	6	8	36
Disability																
yes		2			1	1				1	1	2	1		1	4
no	3	5		3	4	7	1	2		2	1	3	1	6	7	17
unknown					1	1		1								1
Total	3	7	10	3	6	9	1	3	4	3	2	5	2	6	8	36

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

2.5 Increases in client qualification levels

At the time of the case study interview, 76% of clients (n=38) had a Level 4 or below qualification. Two years on 53% (n=19) have a Level 4 or below qualification. Twenty-four per cent of clients (n=12) had a Level 5 or above qualification at the time of the case study interview, two years on 47% (n=17) have a Level 5 or above qualification. Of the seven clients with either no qualifications or a Level 1 qualification at the time of their case study interview, four were contacted for the second follow-up and three reported gaining higher level qualifications.

Table 3, below, shows the changes in highest qualification levels attained by clients, comparing their highest qualification level at the time of the case study interview (2003/04) to their qualification level, 2 years on (2005/06). Qualifications have been mapped on to the new qualification framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland⁸, which includes eight levels plus entry level qualifications.

Over the three years of the research study (2003-2006), the qualification level of 21 clients (58%) has remained unchanged. Three have achieved additional vocational qualifications at a lower level - for example, a graduate who subsequently achieved a vocational qualification at level 2 (see Table 3).

Thirty-three percent of clients (n=12) have achieved higher level qualifications. These have increased their highest qualification by 1 level or more. Most increased their qualification level by 1 or 2 (75%, n=9), whilst three clients (8%) have increased their qualification level by 3 or more. In one particular instance, a client (who received guidance in a further education context) has increased her highest qualification by five levels. At the time of the interview she held no qualifications and was completing a Higher National Diploma (HND). Two years on, she had successfully completed her HND, studied for a further year and had successfully completed a Bachelor's degree. She is currently in full-time employment.

⁸ See http://www.qualifications-across-boundaries.org/compare/uk_ireland.

Table 3 Increase in qualification level of clients, 2003/04 - 2005/06

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=10)	Male	2		1			
	Female	5	1	1			
Higher education (n=9)	Male	2			1		
	Female	1	1		2	2	
Further education (n=4)	Male	1					
	Female	1		1			1
Community/outreach guidance & not for profit organisations (n=5)	Male	2			1		
	Female	1		1			
Private organisations & workplace guidance (n=8)	Male	1		1			
	Female	5	1				
Total (n=36)	Male	8	0	2	2	0	0
	Female	13	3	3	2	2	1

Notes: Qualification levels are mapped on to the England, Wales and Northern Ireland Qualifications Framework (see http://www.qualifications-across-boundaries.org/compare/uk_ireland). In those instances where a client's grades at GCSE were not recorded, Level 2 was assigned.

The increase in the qualification levels of clients from the higher education context relates to those who have successfully completed their degree courses, thereby progressing from Level 3 to Level 5/6 over the last two years.

Whilst it should be stressed that no general claims of causality can be made from this study regarding the relationship between guidance and increased qualifications, these data are consistent with findings from the follow-up study one year on, which indicated that over half of the clients (53%, n=24) were engaging with education or training.

The highest qualification level attained by the clients will be recorded in the final two follow-ups to enable detailed mapping of any further changes.

2.6 Changes in clients' employment status

Since receiving guidance during the case study interview, the employment status of many clients participating in this study has changed. Table 4, below, tracks these changes over the two years since the case study interview. It indicates the impact of care responsibilities, changes in occupation, hours worked and promotions. Data show how changes recorded include different jobs; promotion within the same job; engagement with voluntary work and training and/or education. (Some caution is required in interpreting the data as the cohort numbers have decreased over the course of the research).

The proportion of clients who have entered full-time employment over the period since the case study interview has increased from 22% (that is, 11 of the client participants in 2003/04) to 55.5% (that is, 20 of the client participants in 2005/06) (see Table 4, below). The number of unemployed clients has decreased (from 14 to 3). Similarly, the number of unemployed with caring responsibilities has decreased (from 5 to 1) as they have moved into employment or training and/or education, sometimes in preparation for their return to work. One client's situation has remained unchanged. He is still unemployed with caring responsibilities. Overall, there has been a significant decrease in the number of clients in education and/or training; 24% of participants in 2003/04 to 5.5% in 2005/06 (see Table 4). This decrease is predominantly the result of the higher education clients completing their courses and moving into employment, with only a small number of clients in the sample currently aiming to progress to higher education.

Table 4 Change in client employment status, 2003/04 - 2005/06

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

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

Table 5 Change in client employment status by the organisational context in which guidance was given, 2003/04 - 2005/06

Employment status	IAGP			HE			FE			Community/outreach			Private/Workplace		
	03/04	04/05	05/06	03/04	04/05	05/06	03/04	04/05	05/06	03/04	04/05	05/06	03/04	04/05	05/06
Unemployed undertaking voluntary work	4	4 1	1	1		1	1	1	1	5	1		3		
Unemployed with caring responsibilities	1						1	1		1			2	1	1
In training/education higher level of training/education changed course		1	1 1	8	5 1	2 1	4	1 1				1		1	
In training/education with caring responsibilities Community/outreach guidance undertaking voluntary work	1	2 1	2 1				2				1	1			
Part-time employed with caring responsibilities with caring responsibilities and in training/education in training/education occupational change occupational change and in training/education	3	2	2					2 2	1 1		1	2	1	1	1
Full-time employed* with caring responsibilities promotion occupational change occupational change and caring responsibilities in training/education undertaking voluntary work	4	3 2	4 1	1	3 1	6 2	2	3 1 1	2	2	4 1 1	1	2 1	5 1	6 1 1 1
Other (ill health)	1				1			1							
Total	14	12	10	10	9	9	10	9	4	8	7	5	8	8	8

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

Table 5, above, shows changes in clients' employment status by organisational context in which guidance was given during the case study interview. As in table 4, individual care responsibilities, changes in hours worked, occupation and promotions are indicated.

Predictably, those clients whose case study interview took place in a higher or further education context have subsequently moved out of education. Six of the nine higher education clients have progressed into full-time employment. Of the remaining three clients, two are still in education and one is unemployed because of ill health. The four clients remaining in the study who received guidance in a further education context have either progressed to higher education courses and/or moved into employment and voluntary work.

Across all organisational contexts in which guidance was given, the number of unemployed clients has decreased over the period since the case study interview.

Whilst cohort data relating to qualification level and employment status indicate general career trends for the research sample, they provide limited understanding of the detailed career trajectories of individuals as they unfold. What difficulties have clients overcome in pursuing education or employment goals? How have they tried to overcome obstacles? What have been the successes? What techniques and strategies have been used by clients to achieve success? Answers to these, and other, questions will be explored in the next section.

3. Career trajectories: navigating barriers, maximising opportunities

It has been argued that career transitions have become more complex, more prolonged and often span lifetimes⁹. Indeed, predictions of labour market change, promoted energetically one or two decades ago¹⁰, emphasised profound changes that would follow in the wake of the seismic shift from an industrial to an information society. A radical and challenging vision was provided of employing organisations with flattened hierarchies, in which 'core' staff worked in teams, complemented with an extensive use of outsourced services. This would stimulate the creation of a new breed of 'portfolio workers', working autonomously across a number of 'downsized' organisations, who operated out of paperless offices. All this, inevitably, heralded the demise of the traditional, bureaucratic, organisational career.

However, this grand vision – focusing as it did on overarching trends – has fallen short in a number of respects¹¹. Analysis of labour market data reveals how, in 2000, for example, 96% of workers had one job in the UK; 94.1% of working men and 91.6% of women were in permanent jobs; and of these, 95.2% of men and 73.3% of women worked full-time. Instead of individuals working flexibly, performing tasks for different organisations, there is now more multi-tasking within an organisation as individuals switch from one task to another for the same employer¹²:

⁹ Young, R.A. and Collin, A. (2000) 'Introduction: Framing the Future of Career', in Collin, A. and Young, R.A. (Eds) *The Future of Career*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ For a summary, see Offer, M. (2005) 'The Future of Work and Career: An overview of the Debate', *Career Research and Development*, 13, pp.2-6, NICEC and VT Career Management.

¹¹ Keep, E. and Brown, A. (2005) 'Moving beyond discussions about paradigm shifts – creating space for multiple meanings and narratives on changing patterns of employment and careers', *Career Research and Development*, 13, pp.11-18, NICEC and VT Career Management.

¹² Moynagh, M. and Worsley, R. (2005) *Working in the Twenty-first Century*, Leeds: ESRC Future of Work Programme and King's Lynn: The Tomorrow Project.

“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 and Worsley, 2005, p.93)

Moreover, the proportion of employees seeing themselves as having a career increased from just under half to 60% between 1985 and 2001, with the largest increase (from 14% to 34%) amongst low-paid groups, like bus and coach drivers, packers and cleaners¹³.

Nor has much progress been made towards creating a high skill, knowledge driven economy¹⁴. The United States of America, arguably the model for a knowledge driven economy, is not currently showing many signs of developing a labour market where the majority of workers require a high level of skill. What does emerge is an economy where there are:

“...islands of high skill (geographic clusters, sectors and a few occupations...) set amidst a sea of low skill (and often very poorly paid) service work.”

(Keep and Brown, 2005, p.14).

So, with the now-familiar predictions of labour market and career change contested, what is the reality for individuals navigating the labour market in England? Details of the career trajectories of 36 clients over a three year period (extending from the initial case study, through two follow-up phases of investigation) have been recorded in this study. This section summaries the progress of each one of these individuals and offers a threefold categorisation of client responses to their circumstances, typifying: career disengagement, career investment and career change. It also comments on the role of guidance in this process.

¹³ Moynagh, M. and Worsley, R. (2005) *Working in the Twenty-first Century*, Leeds: ESRC Future of Work Programme and King's Lynn: The Tomorrow Project.

¹⁴ Keep, E. and Brown, A. (2005) 'Moving beyond discussions about paradigm shifts – creating space for multiple meanings and narratives on changing patterns of employment and careers', *Career Research and Development*, 13, pp.11-18, NICEC and VT Career Management.

3.1 Career disengaged

At the time of the second follow-up interview, nine clients were grappling with problems that were preventing them from realising their career aspirations. In many cases, clients regarded these problems as insurmountable and felt disengaged from the labour market. Three sets of circumstances can be identified, which have resulted in the labour market marginalisation of individuals trying to deal with them. These are: health problems; local labour markets and childcare responsibilities. In the first year follow-up, four types of barriers were identified, including the three identified from the second follow-up, and in addition, financial constraints. For those grappling with financial constraints, circumstances had changed, together with their priorities. One example is of a client who felt trapped in a job he disliked by financial commitments. He had, subsequently, re-considered an earlier career interest in teaching, with research subsequently undertaken revealing how it was, after all, feasible to enter training. One other example relates to a client who had had her second child and returned to work full-time. Time constraints had become the primary barrier for her, rather than finance.

3.1.1 Health barriers

Four clients were finding it difficult to progress their careers because of recurrent health problems. One was suffering from multiple, long-term, serious health problems and the difficulties encountered in trying to find employment with these health problems were further compounded by poor literacy skills.

This client had been referred for the case study interview by the Job Centre Disability Employment Adviser. She had been put in touch with an employment support programme that sent information about vacancies. However, nothing had come of this, since she had a medical assessment pending which related to a chronic health problem. Once prospective employers understood her exact circumstances, they were no longer interested. The client saw her situation as '*hopeless*', unless her health problems could be resolved.

Two years after her initial guidance interview, the client was still unemployed. She is, however, currently undertaking an ICT course for two and a half days per week, together with a painting and drawing course. She has still not received a clear diagnosis of the particular medical condition for which she was being assessed and two other health conditions from which she suffers have become more problematic. At

the time of the second follow-up, the client was also recovering from surgery for yet another health problem.

She feels she has not moved any further forward in her aim of getting a job and feels there is no-one who can help her. Additionally, she no longer feels that it's even worth applying for jobs, as she is either refused (because of health and safety concerns), or does not even get a reply:

They just say 'no', or don't let me know at all... ...You fill the forms in...All they say is it's because of health and safety. And that's all you get.

She feels that, although her initial guidance interview seemed helpful at the time, it has made no difference whatsoever to her situation. Her plan is to pursue the medical assessment, in the hope that this will help control at least one of her health problems. She seems unlikely to keep applying for jobs and seems to have completely lost any confidence she had. Her attitude to her current situation is one of despair:

I'm lost!

[Interview 11]

Three other clients were suffering from combinations of health problems, including mental health issues. One in particular is recovering from serious mental illness and continues to suffer from depression and anxiety.

This client is being well supported by a guidance practitioner at the specialist guidance organisation he attended for his case study interview on an on-going basis. Additionally, he has a key worker at the social centre where he receives day care.

With the assistance and support of the guidance organisation, he is working on a voluntary basis at his local football ground. His ambition is to work in catering. To this end, he is hoping to attend a health and hygiene course at his local college in the near future.

It is important to this client that he continues to receive the level of care and support he

is currently getting. However, so far as his future career plans are concerned, he:

.....is not thinking ahead.

[Interview 42]

The remaining two clients struggling with various health problems regard entry to the labour market as possible, but not necessarily imminent. One, suffering from mental illness, already holds a higher education qualification:

After completing a Diploma at University, this client was employed in various jobs. However, none proved satisfactory and she is currently unemployed. She feels that the guidance interview was useful since it helped her to focus on the type of employment she could do and would enjoy.

Two years after the case study interview, the client has undertaken various types of voluntary work, which she feels have helped her to crystallise her thinking and decide on a future career in nursing. To this end, she has applied for nurse training (with interviews pending).

In addition, she has participated in various confidence-building courses, as well as a maths course. After being initially resistant, she is now reconciled to the idea that further training is essential to enable her to achieve her career ambition and re-enter the labour market.

[Interview 24]

The fourth client completed an Access course with the intention of training for one of the paramedical professions. However, her health has prevented her from pursuing this particular course of action.

Persistent health problems have resulted in loss of confidence for this client, who remains unemployed two years after the initial guidance interview. She suffers from mental health issues and has become concerned about starting something that she

may not be able to finish, as well as feeling nervous about the financial implications of undertaking higher education.

It's too much of a risk emotionally, mentally, physically including the financial thing... ..

Over the last year, she has re-evaluated her career aspiration:

...it has made me re-evaluate...I wouldn't want to be in the position where I couldn't actually finish off the course...haven't completely given up on that line (paramedical occupation)...but not doing it through higher education now... ..

A course offered by a local college, which was of interest to this client, turned out to be over-subscribed. She is now considering ways in which she could achieve her career aspiration via a non-traditional entry route. As preparation, she is currently involved in different types of voluntary work, as well as being enrolled on a yoga class. The case study interview was found to be helpful at the time, though retrospectively she doubts its value where the recipient is '*not in a positive frame of mind*'. She feels that specialist knowledge is required to deal with her particular health problem and '*hasn't had the courage to go back...*'

She has, though, now been referred to someone who she feels has the expertise required;

I have been referred to someone over in (local town) who has sort of experience of people who have got health problems

[Interview 28]

3.1.2 Local labour markets

Three clients interviewed two years after their initial guidance interview were finding their local labour market was acting as a constraint on employment opportunities. This was because they needed skills and abilities other than those they were currently able to offer to secure their desired employment in the locality desired. They did not wish to, or were unable to, travel away from their home for employment. One, who has tried to get

guidance and needs help to change direction, feels disadvantaged by the lack of available support.

At the time of the second, follow-up interview, this client had been unemployed for 16 months. Made redundant from the telecommunications industry after a lengthy period of service, he continues to be extremely focused on applying for jobs and going to interviews.

He is, however, unable either to access further guidance support or go on training schemes for unemployed people because he is too highly qualified (so fails to meet the current eligibility criteria, is linked to qualification level). Signing on as unemployed, this client does not qualify for benefits because of savings. He had been trying to find a job that would enable him to use some of his skills in quality management in telecommunications. However, feedback received suggests that he is over-qualified for everything for which he has applied for and is consequently regarded with suspicion. To apply for other jobs he would need new qualifications, but cannot afford to do this without working. He is willing to change career direction and is aware, from his research on the internet, that he might secure a job in northern England, eastern Europe or Ireland. He is, however, reluctant to move away from his parents.

Whilst satisfied with the initial guidance received, he is sceptical about any help available from private organisations and expressed frustration at the lack of high quality careers advice suitable for people with his level of qualifications.

[Interview 13]

The second client suffering from a skills mismatch was made redundant from the printing industry. He is very pessimistic about access to the labour market for older men like him (his fiftieth birthday is looming), with only out-dated skills to offer.

The client has not progressed since his initial guidance interview. He has continued to work in a warehouse for 20 hours a week, which he finds extremely boring. However, he regards any job as better than being unemployed. Ideally, he would like to get another part-time job, though this has not so far proved possible.

He is cynical about the lack of opportunities available to him and seems resigned to his unsatisfactory situation. Lack of transport remains the main barrier to broadening his horizons, but his attitude has now seems to have become a factor since he is unmotivated and disillusioned.

He hates '*being typecast and pushed into things*' and feels he has little prospect of doing anything he really wants to do. He is disillusioned with the Jobcentre, because it could not offer any suitable training. His only hope is that finance might soon become available to enable him to purchase a moped, which would enable him to apply for a much wider range of jobs.

[Interview 15]

The third client holds an NVQ level 1 qualification, but lacks basic skills (numeracy and literacy).

This client had worked as a care assistant and in a shop after leaving school. However, she then became unemployed. After a period of voluntary work in a charity shop, she secured paid employment in another shop. However, she was sacked from this position after a short period of time '*for not doing the job right*'. She feels that she is being prevented from going to college for financial reasons.

Two years after her first guidance interview, she remains unemployed and is signing on. Her Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser had arranged for her to attend the local college to get some help with literacy and numeracy.

[Interview 46]

3.1.3 Childcare responsibilities

The career progression of two women is being constrained by childcare responsibilities. Both feel trapped in part-time employment.

Her initial guidance interview motivated this client to aspire to further education as a means of achieving her career ambition to qualify for social work. However, her young

son's diagnosis with a life-threatening disease soon after the guidance interview halted these plans.

Two years after her guidance interview, this client has encountered a whole range of barriers which have prevented her continuing with the study that will enable her to realise her long term aims. She is currently working part-time in retail. Whilst her son has now started in education, this has not freed up as much of her time as she had hoped it might, because taking and collecting him to school takes considerable time since she does not drive. Childcare during holidays has become a major concern. Employment that would allow term-time working would be the ideal, but is rare – especially without further qualifications. Financing further study is yet another barrier. This client did actually go back to the original guidance practitioner to ask for advice on financial support, but discovered she was not eligible. Having just taken on a mortgage, the financial pressure to work is considerable.

She has received some informal guidance from a nurse who works with her son and has promised to look into work-based training opportunities in family support on her behalf. Lack of time available to study has combined with lack of financial support to stall this client's career plans.

[Interview 20]

The long-term career ambition of the second woman with care responsibilities, also in part-time employment, is to become a successful writer of children's books.

Her youngest child is now in full-time school and she is now working as a 'dinner lady' at the school they are attending. She has enrolled on a writing course and has also recently completed an accredited computer course. A literacy course has helped her find the right words for her writing and she wants to undertake a numeracy course.

In addition to her longer term career goal of becoming an author of children's books, she has considered setting up in business (with her mother) in landscape gardening.

[Interview 43]

To varying degrees, this group of clients is disengaged from formal employment opportunities. Most can offer only low level or outdated skills to prospective employers. One feels discriminated against on the grounds of age. For some, these problems are further compounded by the impact of long-term ill-health or childcare commitments. Career re-engagement for these individuals requires more than a brief guidance process. Rather, it will require a more sustained period of support aimed at overcoming psychological barriers and/or navigating structural obstacles. Two years on, this group have, unsurprisingly, found their case study interview of limited value.

3.2 Career investors

At the time of their second, follow-up interview, eleven clients were continuing to invest in their own human capital¹⁵ development to improve their labour market value. Two were at an early stage of investing in their careers, trying to secure the qualifications needed to pursue ambitions. One, a single mother of a school-age child, had enrolled as a full-time mature student at her local Further Education College.

Training to be a hairdresser was this client's original ambition, but the nearest college offering the course was too distant, given childcare responsibilities. As an alternative, she enrolled on an Adult Returners' Course. She had hoped to pursue strands on confidence building and 'returner', skills but these were not offered. Two years after her case study interview, she is doing what she describes as '*social science subjects, with women's bits!*' Additionally, she is studying GCSE Maths and English, to upgrade her out-dated school qualifications. The course also provides the opportunity to achieve formal accreditation in other subjects, which include sociology, psychology, study skills, research methods and ICT. One other outcome from the course will be a fully developed Curriculum Vitae.

The college offers personal support and review through a tutorial system (as well as a

¹⁵ Human capital is a way of defining and categorising peoples' skills and abilities in relation to employment and the labour market. Many economic theories regard it as a commodity and refer to it as labour. Other conceptions are more sophisticated, incorporating variations around, for example, social capital, individual capital and instructional capital.

free travel card). She is enjoying the course, although it is hard work and '*there are not enough hours in the week*'. Her only difficulty relates to her inability to afford a computer with internet access at home.

She regards the guidance support she received as '*very helpful*', which proved to be '*a stepping stone*'. She did try to access further guidance, but staff shortages in the guidance organisation meant she was unsuccessful. Her longer term career goal is to enrol on an Access to Higher Education course.

[Interview 2]

Whilst the other client already holds a degree in pharmacology from a Nigerian university, she wants to re-train in the UK for medicine.

On arrival in England, this client applied for a medical degree and was informed that her qualifications were not adequate, so enrolled on an 'Access to Medicine' course. Two years on, she is still determined to pursue her long term career goal of becoming a doctor. She has now successfully completed her Access Course, but failed to secure an offer of a place on a medical course for the academic year 2005/06. She is not clear of the reason, but does not think it was academic.

Now, she is taking a year off and applying to different institutions. Meanwhile, she is working in a children's nursery and enjoying this work. She had been involved on a casual basis, but was invited to apply for a job.

The guidance interview was regarded as both useful and influential in the actions she has subsequently taken. She observed that the advice given to her by the guidance practitioner was entirely consistent with than given to others on her Access Course.

[Interview 47]

Six clients had already started to invest in their own human capital development. Since their case study interview, they had successfully completed degree courses and were all in some type of employment. A recurrent theme emerging in relation to the career trajectories of these graduates was the recognition that, even having already invested considerable resources in their education, they needed to secure work experience to

enhance their chances of achieving longer term career aims. For example, two are working for private recruitment agencies. The first is receiving an 'excellent income', but is working long hours (50-60 hours per week). She sees her current employment as providing the experience necessary to set up her own business some time in the future [Interview 6]. The second changed his career idea as a direct result of research undertaken after guidance interview. His short term plan is to consolidate his career learning within his present employment context, with a view to further training for a career in Human Relations or marketing in the future. Interesting, this client reflected on how the experience of working with graduates in his capacity as recruiter had helped him understand the importance of career guidance. He expressed the opinion '*that every degree course should have structured and compulsory careers lectures, or even a complete module*' [Interview 21].

The third graduate, who completed a degree in the summer of 2005, is working on a temporary contract for a charitable organisation. Despite signing up with numerous recruitment agencies, no satisfactory offer of employment has yet come through. Ideally, she would like to train for social work, but cannot afford the additional costs this represents. To achieve her longer term career aim of employment in some form of 'community work', in the shorter term, she plans to work part-time and gain relevant voluntary work experience [Interview 7].

The fourth and fifth graduates had expressed an interest in teaching. The fourth completed his degree in the summer of 2005, though was subsequently unsuccessful with his application for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in Further Education for entry to a course for the academic year 2005/06. To strengthen his application for another attempt at entry to teacher training, he is currently undertaking voluntary work in a local middle school and combining this with factory work [Interview 19]. The fifth holds a degree in American Studies and a postgraduate qualification in journalism. He tried, unsuccessfully, to apply for teacher training after his initial guidance interview. Two years later, he is employed in clerical work and has now decided against teaching. He is now attracted to working in the area of child protection and to this end is undertaking relevant voluntary employment to strengthen his application for the further training necessary [Interview 22].

The sixth employed graduate had completed both an HND and then a degree in Travel and Tourism. She found her current job in hospitality via the internet and plans to

remain with her current employer for at least twelve months to gain the work experience she feels she lacks [Interview 39].

Two other new graduates have also recognised the need to invest in yet further higher qualifications to enter their chosen areas, so are currently undertaking graduate training schemes. One, who decided she wanted to go into library work after graduating, is now on a temporary graduate training contract [Interview 14]. The other is on a full-time Masters degree in Art History [Interview 35].

Finally, one student changed her degree after two years, because she was unhappy with her initial choice of subject. She is currently in the second year of a Business Studies degree, which she is enjoying [Interview 25].

All of these eleven clients have recognised that achieving a high level career goal involves considerable investment, not only in educational qualifications, but also in the workplace experience they can offer potential employers. They were all prepared to sacrifice short-term rewards to secure longer term ambitions. As a consequence, they are engaged in prolonged career transitions – often with uncertainty attached to the possible outcomes. This is increasingly typical of the career trajectories of many young people making their transitions from education into the labour market¹⁶ and represents particular challenges for guidance¹⁷.

3.3 Career changers

The distinguishing feature of the career trajectories of the remaining sixteen clients followed up two years after their initial guidance interview was the career changes they had made in the two years since their initial guidance interview. Two types of career changers can be identified: strategists or opportunists.

¹⁶ Elias, P., Davies, R., Purcell, K., and Wilton, N. (2005) *The Class of '99: A study of the early labour market experience of recent graduates*, DfES Research Report, Sheffield.

¹⁷ Roberts, K. (1997) 'Prolonged transitions to uncertain destinations: the implications for careers guidance', *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 25, 3. pp.345-360.

3.3.1 Strategic careerists

Eight clients see their current occupational position and/or organisational attachment as one phase of a career that involves relatively frequent changes in the nature of their employment. They are committed to 'moving on' and see their careers as something they actively construct. They are reconciled to the need to adapt and update their skills, knowledge and understanding constantly.

The first had left school at eighteen and gone into administration.

At the time of his initial case study interview, this client had expressed dissatisfaction with his job and an interest in going into higher education. Subsequently, he discussed these plans with his line manager, who offered to re-train him (in ICT) to keep him within the company.

Two years on, this client was still employed by the same company. However, as a result of recent organisational re-structuring, everyone had to re-apply for employment. As he was not successful in his application for a more senior job, this client had decided to take voluntary redundancy. As part of the redundancy package, the company is paying for re-training, so this client has chosen to qualify to teach English as a foreign language – with the aim of travelling to the Far East. If these plans are not successful, another option under consideration is to undertake an Access course, with a view to progressing into higher education (discussed at the first guidance interview, two years ago).

[Interview 1]

The second client had gone into retail immediately after her first degree. Having grown dissatisfied with this, she attended her first guidance interview to explore alternatives. Subsequently, she researched a number of the options discussed and used temporary work to test them out further.

Although she had been keen to move out of retail, the opportunity to train as a manager had presented itself. She applied, successfully. Again, she became dissatisfied because she wasn't learning enough or at a fast enough pace. Then her partner was re-located in his job. She left her job and moved with him, then spotted an

advert for a store manager at nearly three times her previous salary. Once again, she successfully applied.

After some time in this post, the client was given a further opportunity to establish and manage a new retail outlet on a retail park by her company. She accepted the challenge, selected and trained her own team and established a successful branch that is now breaking all financial targets. At the time of the second follow-up interview, the client reported how this was initially exciting, but that the long hours are now proving onerous. She feels she has no time for a social life or to develop her qualifications.

Her ambition to change career direction is being thwarted by her lack of experience and relevant qualifications. So her short term plans are to look for a retail job more local and less demanding. These career plans are influenced by her personal plans:

I'm at a turning point where I can take a step back, maybe wait a few years, have a child and then tackle something different...I'm getting excited about...my work life changing completely.

[Interview 5]

A third client had been employed in financial administration since leaving University.

He had organised his initial guidance interview because he felt 'trapped' in this job and wanted something that used his degree subject. However, various constraints (financial and geographical) were proving to be problematic. When he left university, he had thought of teaching, but not pursued this idea. He had started thinking about this option again. After undertaking some research, he realised that it was financially feasible and submitted an application for teacher training. Two years on, this client had resigned from his job and started a PGCE course, with the intention of teaching in a secondary school.

[Interview 26]

A 'woman returner', the fourth career strategist, was planning to re-enter the labour market (after ten years absence to raise a family). Previously, she had worked as an IT

instructor, drafts person and in electronics and telecommunications (in which she holds a qualification).

At the time of her initial case study interview, the client had arranged an interview at a college to start a teaching qualification for those in Further Education. Whilst doing this qualification, she had decided that she really wanted '*to follow her dream*' to be a garden designer. So she took steps to achieve this by enrolling on a three year part-time degree course in garden design at an agricultural college. Once her child is at senior school, she hopes to set up her own business, initially offering a design service:

At the time of the second interview, this client was half way through her part-time degree course in garden design. She is also gaining relevant work experience and has volunteered at her daughter's school to tend the gardens and start a vegetable patch. Additionally, she has undertaken much of the decoration and renovation of her new house.

[Interview 40]

At the time of the case study interview, the fifth client was working as the Acting Sales Manager for a newspaper. He felt he was not being rewarded for the extra responsibility this involved and seemed generally discontent with his work. He had done a considerable amount of research into alternative careers and was very focused on becoming a Physiotherapist.

One year on, this client had given up his job and was studying full-time, combining a science-based access course with science GCSE work and related evening classes. He had applied for a Physiotherapy degree and was waiting for an interview with a University.

Two years on, this client had passed his Access course and additional GCSE which enabled him to get on the degree course. He was enrolled on a physiotherapy degree course, which he described it as 'hard work', but very enjoyable.

[Interview 45]

The sixth career strategist was considering going back into the film industry after taking a break to have a family.

One year on, she explained how, subsequent to the interview, she researched various jobs, but decided that the penalties attached to returning to what would be a junior post for her was not attractive. The long hours expected in this industrial sector were also likely to be problematic. So she decided to look for something else to do. She therefore decided to open a children's specialist shoe shop and is now planning to open a second shop.

Two years on, she is still managing the shop and planning to open a second.

[Interview 49]

The seventh client is an aspiring artist. At the time of the case study interview, he was working as a Media Technician at a local school. He has a degree in Fine Art, Print Making and Photo Media. His main aim was to find more art related work, with quite broad based ideas including photography and writing. He recognised that his current job was unfulfilling but felt at a loss to know where to look for the sort of work he would enjoy.

One year on, he had left his job at the school. Keen to do something more relevant to his degree, he recognised its limitations in the labour market and was currently unemployed. He was considering re-training for journalism, though finance was an issue.

Two years on, the client had been unemployed for most of the intervening year. He was working temporarily in administration, which he describes as '*mind numbingly boring*', but provides the money needed to allow him to paint, which is what he really wants to do. He describes the past year as a time in which he got his '*head straight*', regarding it as an '*extra year as a student*'. He spent some time on a job seeking course, which he found demeaning because it did not take account of his being a graduate. In the short term job, he intends to stay in his current job and is hoping to sell some of his paintings.

[Interview 37]

Finally, the eighth career strategist had worked for the same organisation, a children's charity, since leaving school (at the time of her initial guidance interview, she was twenty four years old). She started employment as an administration assistant and, at the time of her initial case study interview was in charge of IT. Whilst she liked working for the organisation, she was not enjoying the IT role and wanted to think about a new career direction.

One year on, she had started a new job as Office Support Manager in a Highways and Planning department with a County Council. A barrier to her changing career direction was salary, as this may have meant a reduction, which had not really been an option for her because of financial commitments. Two years on, she was about to get married. She felt her career is '*in a rut*'. She had wanted to undertake management training, but her employer (a County Council) said priority had to be given to those 'in most need'. Since she is able to do her job adequately, without the training, the option was not therefore available. However, with her financial situation potentially becoming more stable with her impending marriage, she feels she could now consider a pay cut if that would give her more career options. She has thought briefly about some type of job with community involvement.

[Interview 41]

3.3.2 Opportunistic careerists

This describes those individuals who have take opportunities that have presented themselves, however unexpected, and tried (often successfully) to turn them to their advantage. Eight clients in this study demonstrate this approach to career change. The first had been out of work since April 2003 after suffering a stroke caused by job-related stress. A career change was recommended by the medical consultant. At the time of his initial case study interview, the client was very uncertain (given his medical history) about the viability of his returning to full-time employment, but was concerned about his financial situation. The unexpected hospitalisation of his wife had placed a further strain on the family's finances. He decided to return to part-time employment, initially, to test out his resilience to work.

One year on, he had tried a computer training course, which had proved to be a negative experience (*'I was really knocking my head against the wall...'*) and then applied unsuccessfully for retail jobs. However, he had been successful in securing employment in the social care sector and one year after the initial guidance, was working 70 hours a week across two employers in jobs that are both in the social care sector. One of the employers had agreed to support him to study for vocational qualifications.

Two years on, this client was still working for the same two employers. Despite long hours, he is not experiencing any stress-related problems: *'I love my job!'* He has progressed with his NVQ Level 3 and is very keen to continue his studies to an NVQ level 4. Although he is *'keeping an eye'* out for other jobs in the same sector he has no plans to change jobs.

As part of a recent review at work, it has been noted that he is capable of management duties and could run his own care home – a suggestion he finds interesting.

[Interview 23]

As a consequence of suffering from glandular fever, the second opportunistic career changer had graduated with a lower degree classification than expected. At her guidance interview, she wanted help focusing on her job search. Several career options were discussed, together with the idea of working abroad.

After her initial guidance interview, this client spent five months in Greece working in a Beauty Salon and a hotel bar. On the advice of a work colleague, she returned to England one month earlier than planned to undertake vocational training in beauty therapy and sports massage.

Two years on, she is employed in two organisations: firstly in a women's prison five days a week, offering holistic therapies; secondly, at a golf and beauty spa in the treatment room on Friday nights and at the weekend. The position in the prison she regards as a 'golden opportunity' and she felt she was 'lucky', as she was only offered the job after the prison's first choice of candidate had problems with their references.

On the same day she was interviewed at a beauty spa and accepted a part-time position in the treatment rooms. After two months of working in the prison, her supervisor left and she was offered the position which she accepted (though she has been offered no training support and is struggling with some aspects of this role).

In addition to a full-time and a part-time job, this client is also undertaking vocational courses in various alternative therapies and ICT. Additionally, she has now gained a further education teaching certificate.

[Interview 27]

After graduation, the third client in this group had worked in a residential home for the mentally ill, then in retail before taking a career break to raise a family. Returning to employment ten years later, she had worked for the Citizen's Advice Bureau for a year before joining a city council. At the time of her initial guidance interview, she had been working part-time for two months in the 'Disabilities Social Services', co-ordinating the independent living fund. The guidance practitioner arranged for her to take a psychometric test and discuss the results.

One year on, the client was still working for the council, but had reduced her hours to two days a week (from three) so that she can study for two days a week. The client had taken the psychometric test after her case study interview, which had revealed that she was numerate, scoring highly on numerical analysis and data analysis. She subsequently enrolled on a part-time distance learning course in accountancy.

Two years on, this client remains with the same employer but in a different role, with supervisory responsibilities. She is part way through her accountancy course and had applied for a secondment in the finance department, relevant to her studies. However, she was not able to pursue this opportunity since the person with whom she shared her job left her employment, so the client could not leave her position.

As a result, she is struggling a little with her accountancy course as her current position does not permit her to use or implement any learning from the course. She is, however, enjoying the challenges of her new job.

[Interview 29]

The fourth client is a Fine Arts graduate, having completed her degree some 20 years previously. At the time of her initial guidance interview, she had been teaching for nine years and was working part-time as a teacher in a Nursery School. Her post was to be made redundant. The client's main concern was to find other work but her situation had prompted her to look at alternatives to nursery teaching as she felt that teaching posts for young children would become scarce as the work was increasingly done by classroom assistants. Family commitments meant that she was restricted to a particular geographical locality.

One year on, the client had decided to leave her teaching post voluntarily. She then applied for a training course to lecture teaching assistants on their foundation degree. Immediately after training, she was offered work, so worked part-time for about six months. Alongside this part-time employment, the client had been attending college to train to be an NVQ assessor. She has also trained to be a learning support assistant and to supplement her low income, she is working in a café. After trying, unsuccessfully, to get back into teaching, she now felt ambivalent about returning to the profession. However, with a significant period of working life ahead of her, she felt as though she has regressed because her skills and experience are under-valued in the labour market.

Two years on, the client is combining a range of part-time teaching posts. She describes this as '*finding a new way of life*'. She particularly enjoyed backstage theatre work (which came from a job she had in the theatre's café) and the experience of working with people much younger than herself. Whilst she loves the theatre work, she doesn't see it as a viable job. She has lectured on a teaching assistant's course and more recently on a Diploma in Childcare. This work is part-time, but has grown from half a day to two and a half days. However feels there is some uncertainty about her future there as it is dependant on student enrolments.

Overall, this client feels that her career development has been somewhat dependant on personal contacts and being in the right place at the right time. Jobs have come through people she knows. This has generated a lot of different offers of part-time work over the year – in fact more than she felt she could take on.

She doesn't want a full-time post:

I never knew what I wanted to do and kind of fall into things by accident...

[Interview 31]

The fifth client came to his initial guidance interview wanting a complete change of career direction. He completed a computer aided guidance program, which he found frustrating because the jobs suggested either required three or four years training (which he could not afford) or were for younger entrants.

One year on, he had taken a temporary job with the Post Office. Then he had secured a new job as a Driving Examiner. He had seen the advertisement for this job in a local newspaper.

Two years on, he had been given a permanent contract for his job after a nine month probationary period.

[Interview 32]

The sixth career opportunist had been working in an insurance broker for four years and wanted to find something that would enable her to make better use of her skills when she came to her initial guidance interview. An area of interest was legal executive/legal secretary.

One year on, she was still with the same employer, because she had been given more responsibility and more pay. She was still interested in becoming a legal secretary, but she was finding the pay and opportunities for training discouraging. She had decided to wait and see if any opportunities to develop in her current job became available.

Two years on, she had just returned from an eight month back-packing trip around the world, having resigned from her job in insurance. In need of money on her return, she contacted her previous employer and was offered employment doing the same job, but with more money.

She would like access to further guidance to identify future career options.

[Interview 38]

The remaining two clients in this group had had their career plans affected by their partner's redundancy and were demonstrating opportunistic career behaviour in coping with its impact. One, who was returning to the labour market after a career break to have her first child at the time of her first guidance interview, had wanted to change career direction to become a social worker. However, her plans were thwarted by the unexpected redundancy of her partner.

As a consequence, she had returned full-time to her original job, to earn the money necessary to meet financial commitments, forgoing the training required for social work.

By the second follow-up interview, she had had her second child – four months old at the time of the interview. She had once again returned to full-time employment, as her partner was still unemployed. Her career aim is still to become a social worker, but her plans regarding the route to qualification had changed. She had researched distance learning options and identified the most relevant combination. However, the number of options for which she could register and the timing of these courses depended entirely on family circumstances. In particular, the employment status of her partner. So this client remained committed to her career aim to qualify in social work, but was being flexible and creative about exactly how she would pursue her aim.

[Interview 8]

A second client was just completing a series of guidance sessions that were part of her own redundancy package at the time of her initial guidance interview.

After her interview, she had quickly secured a job, attributing her success to the guidance support she had received. Two years on, she is still with the company she was working for at the time of the first follow-up interview, in the same role.

However, her husband has now been made redundant. This has had an influence on her plans for the coming year and has triggered a decision to leave her job and travel for six months together from June 2006. She intends to re-appraise her employment options on her return.

[Interview 10]

3.4 Conclusions

Analysis of the career trajectories of the 36 individuals who participated in the second follow up phase of this study provides insights into how careers emerge in the labour market in England, with a multiplicity of factors combining to produce complex patterns of movement. Additionally, it increases understanding of how individuals respond to the particular circumstances in which they find themselves and how they attempt to progress their careers.

The evidence from this study suggests that individuals do, indeed, see themselves as having a 'career'. This is particularly apparent in the group of nine individuals who are currently disengaged and/or regard themselves as marginalised from formal employment, since they feel frustrated (sometimes angry) that, despite their considerable efforts, they have failed to re-enter what they regard as mainstream career opportunities.

The majority of clients in this study, whether or not disengaged from formal employment, see their career as being both located, and developing, within employing organisations – rather than as autonomous workers or self-employed. Only five of the 36 interviewed expressed any interest in self-employment (two in garden design; one aspiring artist; one unspecified and a fifth who was working autonomously across different teaching institutions because of redundancy). The others were either aspiring towards, or working in, organisational careers like: medicine; paramedical professions; teaching; insurance; hospitality; marketing; events management; social work; social care; work with offenders; community work; and driving examiner. Moreover, the majority recognised and accepted the need to invest, sometimes considerable, resources, to increase their market value. What, therefore, has the role of guidance been in the development of these varied career identities?

4. Two years on: Client reflections on their guidance interview

A key objective of this research study is to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance interventions, from the perspective of the client. During the first phase of data collection, 49 of the 50 clients indicated that they had found their case study interview useful, immediately after the event. One year on, the proportion of clients who still regarded their case study interview useful had diminished slightly. Eighty-seven per cent (n=39) of the 45 clients successfully contacted still regarded their case study interview as useful. Two years on, the proportion of clients contacted who regarded their case study interview useful had reduced further, to 72% (n=26). However, the client who had expressed a negative opinion about the guidance she had received during the first phase of data collection was now able to identify ways in which she had, in fact, acted on advice received in her case study interview. Specifically, she had undertaken training to improve two particular areas of weakness identified by the practitioner. This finding supports the expectation that where an effective challenge is made within a guidance interview relating to a client's unrealistic career beliefs or expectations, the client's initial reaction is likely to be negative. In the light of events unfolding subsequently, the client may, however, be able to reflect on the realistic nature of the guidance.

Of the remaining ten clients followed up two years on, five (14%) were either less sure about the usefulness of the guidance received, or believed that, with the benefit of hindsight, it had been of limited use. A further five (14%) could no longer recollect the guidance they had received sufficiently well to feel able to comment on its usefulness. This represents an increase in the number of clients who expressed uncertainty about the usefulness of their case study interview one year later (11%, n=5).

Reasons given by clients for their perceptions of guidance two years on are discussed below.

4.1 Useful guidance, two years on

As in the first year follow-up, the way clients now regarded guidance received during their case study interview was probed. The majority reflected positively on their interview and persisted in their belief that it had been useful to them (72%, n=26). In particular, clients regarded guidance as valuable where it:

- had been an 'eye-opener';

- helped focus ideas and / or career direction;
- improved confidence, both in themselves and career decisions made ;
- provided the opportunity for reflection; and
- had given access to expert information and advice.

Specific examples of these five categories of ‘useful’ guidance follow. For instance, guidance that provided revelatory insights was valued by clients. Five clients (14%) reported how it proved to be an ‘eye-opener’ when it either helped them understand options available and/or recognise their true abilities. One commented that it helped him understand that career change was, indeed, possible:

I was 23 I think at the time...I was a bit stuck and not quite sure where to go...it was an eye-opener to know that you actually can leave full-time employment! You can go and do an Access course to prepare you to study at university. I remember [guidance practitioner] said that...I should go to university...I'd get full kind of grants or whatever...Had I not gone to the [guidance organisation] then I would have just plodded along...I would have just thought, well I shouldn't really complain and just get on with it...

[Interview 1]

For another, guidance had made her aware of the different career options available:

It was the first time I realised that there was something else...out there... ..probably would be working myself to the bone on, like, two different jobs. Not enjoying myself, not doing what I wanted to do... ..so as an initial thing for me, yes, it was a stepping stone...I'd just like to say that I was so depressed at the time you wouldn't believe it.

[Interview 2]

The results of a psychometric test, undertaken as part of the guidance process, helped one other client understand why she had enjoyed some aspects of her job and not others. This increased self-awareness gave her the confidence to change jobs. Additionally, guidance gave her the opportunity ‘to bounce ideas off someone’. She particularly valued both how the guidance practitioner had taken account of her emotional well-being and provided her with encouragement.

For two clients (6%), guidance had helped focus ideas and / or career, whilst six (17%) said it had improved their confidence, not only in themselves, but also in the career decisions they had made. One client explained how the guidance interview represented

a significant turning point, since it gave her the confidence to change her higher education course and provided information about options available:

I was deciding on whether I wanted to stay on my course or not and I think it [the guidance interview] helped me to decide that... ...I think possibly I would have dropped out of Uni and gone home and started working, but just like speaking to the careers officer at Uni sort of showed me what my different options were.

[Interview 25]

The value of guidance in building clients' self-confidence emerges as a recurrent theme throughout this study. A number of clients in the second year follow-up reflected on how it had supported them in making career decisions to: study within a higher education institution; find new employment; gain further qualifications to improve employability; change careers; and start a new business.

Opportunities provided by guidance to reflect, discuss ideas and explore options with a trained professional were noted by five clients (14%). For instance:

...it was a wonderful opportunity to sit back and say 'Ok, what do I really want to do?'...the travelling and the marketing were the things that sort of came up for me and I've still got a stock of ideas that I stored at the time... ...the time that I spent there enabled me to just take stock and as I say, see things from different angles...

[Interview 10]

[Someone]...who knew what they were talking about, rather than speaking emotionally and knowing me personally and sort of weighing up the pros and cons that way. Just to clarify that I wasn't completely mad and that it was possible, and it was do-able if I applied myself you know...I wanted to speak to someone who was objective.

[Interview 45]

Access to expert information and advice was highlighted by four clients (11%). In particular: course information; financial advice and funding opportunities; work experience; advice on changing careers; and information about what different careers involve.

4.2 Usefulness of guidance: increased uncertainty

Five (14%) clients contacted two years after the case study interview were now either unsure of the usefulness of the guidance they had received or viewed its value as limited. Reasons included the belief that, ultimately, it is the individual's responsibility to determine career direction, rather than a practitioner:

I think that it was just really difficult for myself, and also for the careers adviser, when the person doesn't know exactly what they want to do. If they do know, then the help can steer you in the right direction. But if you don't know, then its up to you really to work it out isn't it?

[Interview 39]

And the perception that practical advice is less helpful than active and empathic listening:

Perhaps less practical advice, more that it was just very useful to speak to someone, hear their sort of professional response to your ideas.

[Interview 35]

Other reasons given by clients for regarding the guidance as less useful than previously was: that help with job placement had been their urgent priority (this was not provided); and that one client had not really wanted help at the time of their interview as he had just been made redundant and was not sure what he wanted to do.

4.3 Career progression: influences

As indicated above, in 4.1, the majority of clients regarded their guidance positively two years after the event. However, 16 (44%) thought that the influence of guidance on their career progression was either marginal or negligible. Specifically:

- 3 believed that it had only affirmed ideas;
- 6 felt that guidance had made no impact on their situation (2 found their current employment unaided);
- 2 believed that guidance was just part of a process of moving on for them (i.e. changing career and applying to higher education);
- 2 wanted help with financial barriers to progression;
- 1 believed that ideas were discussed, but no firm decisions were made; and
- 2 clients provided no explanation.

Seventeen clients (47%) thought that the greatest influence on their career progression was support given by family, friends and colleagues. This reflects other recent research findings that clients utilise a diverse range of resources, including work colleagues, family and friends¹⁸. These alternative sources of support had generally provided positive encouragement for clients to achieve career aspirations and make career decisions. However, one did report how the experiences of a friend had discouraged him from pursuing a particular career path.

Alternative sources of support included: managers; tutors; recruitment consultants and fairs; voluntary organisation; social workers; Jobcentre Plus adviser; and local college.

4.4 Further guidance: reflections

The majority of clients (61%, n=22) had not had any further guidance over the last year. Of these, some (25%, n=9) felt that currently they did not need further guidance. Two were confused about available guidance and training provision.

Nine clients (25%) had received further guidance over the past year. Of these, seven reported that either they had not found it useful or that services were no longer available. Where available but not useful, problems with guidance included: failure of practitioners to follow-up on agreed action; incorrect advice; or inappropriate timing.

Six clients (17%), overall, indicated their lack of confidence in 'government agencies'. They reported difficulties getting appointments, accessing further information; and/or securing training required. One had had a negative experience of a government training programme.

4.5 Future support and additional help required

Over half of the clients followed-up (53%, n=19) would consider seeking further guidance sometime in the future. One actually had arranged an appointment to see a

¹⁸ Taylor, J., Vasickova, D., Byrom, A and Dickson, J. (2005) *Demand for, and Perceptions of, Information, Advice and Guidance. A Research Study Conducted for the Guidance Council by Mori*. Leicester: The Guidance Council. Available [Online] <http://www.niace.org.uk/publications/D/DemandIAG.asp>

guidance practitioner in the week after the follow-up interview. Those clients that stated they would return for career guidance to:

- access and utilise resources for job hunting;
- obtain further information on different courses;
- get help with future direction;
- get advice on application and CV writing; and
- discuss ideas.

Four clients (11%) indicated they were likely to get further advice and guidance from their employer, colleagues or a university.

Some clients discussed their ideas of how information, advice and guidance services could be improved to meet their needs. They identified the need for:

- better distribution of information;
- improved marketing of services;
- help with financial costs of training;
- access to careers advisers locally;
- help with accessing training;
- access to careers advice when applying for higher education;
- (for students) structured careers lectures and/or a higher education module for Careers Education and Guidance; and
- more support for mothers with dependant children wishing to return to work.

5. Managing career change

When asked to reflect on progress over the past year and career changes, most of the 36 clients who participated in the second follow-up talked openly, highlighting recent choices and career decisions. Many described what they had learned and how they had changed. This related, mostly, to an increased self-awareness and an understanding of their abilities. Future career aspirations were also probed, which often led to the clients identifying barriers to achievement.

5.1 Career change

The circumstances of eight (22%) of the 36 clients who participated in the two years on follow-up were the same as when they were contacted for the one year on follow-up. However, 14 (39%) reported some type of career change over the past year. These included:

- being promoted and / or receiving a pay rise;
- accepting a voluntary redundancy package;
- participating in voluntary work;
- enrolling on an educational course;
- completing a course and / or gaining a qualification;
- being caught up in organisational restructuring; or
- changing their participation in employment (for example, increasing hours worked).

In addition to changes related directly to formal employment, clients reported changes in personal circumstances that had impinged indirectly on career change. These included:

- moving house;
- pregnancy and childbirth; and
- international travel (i.e. time out from employment).

For some (n=8), career plans had changed. Others had started to think differently about their career progression. This was a result of: increased self-confidence; changes to their financial situation; or greater understanding of particular job roles and occupations. For example, organisational restructuring suddenly provided one client with various options previously not available. For many clients, various decision-making styles (outlined in section 5.2, below) have been critical to changes in career.

5.2 Career decision-making styles

Career-decision making has been the focus of various research studies. For example, the cultural dimensions of career decision-making difficulties¹⁹; career maturity in career decidedness and career decision-making²⁰; the role of values in the career decision-making process²¹; and levels of confidence as predictors of career decision-making ability²². Data collected from 36 clients interviewed for the second follow-up of this study indicates distinctive approaches to career decision-making. Four different styles emerged from the analysis:

- evaluative;
- strategic;
- aspirational; and
- opportunistic.

(It should be noted that decisions that contributed overall to an individual's career progression were often independent of actual career changes discussed in 5.1, above.)

5.2.1 Evaluative

Six clients (16%) had engaged with a process of self-reflective evaluation that had aided their career decision making in some way. This typically comprised a period (sometimes prolonged) of review, evaluation and reflection, eventually culminating in decisions that potentially contributed to a longer term career goal, though with a characteristic degree of uncertainty and ambiguity built into the process. One client, for example, whose marriage had recently ended, had been thwarted in achieving her primary goal of attending a particular type of vocational training, because of its lack of availability locally. Consequently, she has opted to enrol on an adult education course. Although this was not her first choice, she recognised that it was having a positive impact on her self-confidence, with the result that she is now aiming higher with her educational achievements:

¹⁹ Wei-Cheng, J. Mau (2004) 'Cultural Dimensions of Career Decision-Making Difficulties', *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53, 1, pp.67-77.

²⁰ Creed, P.A. and Patton, W. (2003) 'Predicting Two Components of Career Maturity in School Based Adolescents', *Journal of Career Development*, 29, 4, pp.277-290.

²¹ Colozzi, E.A. (2003) 'Effective Techniques: Depth-Oriented Values Extraction', *The Career Development Quarterly*, 52, 2, pp.180-189.

²² Paulsen, A.M. and Betz, N.E. (2004) 'Basic Confidence Predictors of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy', *The Career Development Quarterly*, 52, 4, pp.354-362.

It's brilliant because I actually realise that, you know, I love to learn... ..it has shown me what I'm capable of and what I like doing. So I have applied for that [Access] course.

[Interview 2]

In the longer term, however, she remains somewhat vague about her career goal.

One other client had evaluated her current employment situation as a direct result of gaining greater self-awareness of her abilities and aptitudes through the guidance process. This prompted her to review problems she had been experiencing with her current employment and, at the time of the second follow-up interview, was starting to identify ways of addressing these difficulties in a way that was consistent with her personal values:

I don't think local government is for me, but I've decided that I'm going to wait and find the right thing...so I've got my eyes open, but I'm not going to jump into the first thing that looks good...I think I'm going to possibly look at a cut in pay, so that I can, maybe, refocus my career in another direction.

[Interview 41]

The process of self-reflective evaluation characteristic of this career decision-making style is closely linked to greater levels of self-awareness – with clients typically using this knowledge as a basis for future career decision-making.

5.2.2 Strategic

In contrast with this rather open-ended, self-reflective, evaluative decision-making process, nine clients (25%) had engaged proactively with more focused strategic career decision-making. Here, clients had identified their ultimate career goal and were making conscious, strategic career decisions related to formal employment, designed to contribute to that long term objective. For instance, one had speculatively approached various companies at a careers fair for graduate employment, arranged interviews and accepted one of the three job appointments offered. She regarded this employment experience as necessary preparation for realising her ambition of running her own business:

...basically they put me on their finance team...and I decided it was a lot more interesting than doing the IT side of things which (another company) had offered me...and yeah I'm really, really enjoying it... ..It sort of came down to looking for what I wanted out of a job, which was to be fairly autonomous, to

sort of have the ability to progress quickly and to earn a lot of income, to develop clients... It's almost like running your own business in a way, which is what I would like to do eventually...

[Interview 6]

Another client was operating in a similar way, sacrificing job satisfaction in the short term for the achievement of a longer term career goal:

I deliberately took this particular role so that I could manoeuvre myself around different spheres of work... ...I am pretty sure that it is going to pay dividends... ...In terms of moving on for the next job, it should set me up very nicely. It's not stretching me mentally...but I've deliberately taken it so I can get experience in extra fields.

[Interview 10]

5.2.3 Aspirational

For other clients (14%, n=5), an aspirational decision-making process is based on focused, but distant career goals. Unlike clients engaged in strategic career decision-making, interim goals currently being pursued seem almost tangential to the ultimate career aspiration – yet represent essential preparation. These interim goals are not necessarily related to formal employment; rather they often relate to personal circumstances. One client, established in a highly successful career, is dissatisfied and determined to change direction. However, before she is ready to re-train for her aspirational career goal, other important issues in her life need resolution. Currently, for example, she is focused on securing her financial future. Then it appears likely that she will start a family, before applying herself to re-focusing her career:

I just thought, you know, I'm only in my early 20s, work, work, work, you know...so we got the house and financially we're a lot better off now, because of working last year and putting our noses to the grindstone...I feel like at the moment I'm sort of at a turning point where if I step back, if you wait a couple of years, you have a child and then maybe sort of tackle something completely different. I think in my head I've sort of got quite excited about that aspect of, you know, my work life changing completely once I get past that point.

[Interview 5]

5.2.4 Opportunistic

The final process of career decision-making included those clients whose choices and direction over the last two years have been based on the opportunities available to them

(25%, n=9). One client who graduated two years before the second follow-up interview is still unsure of her career direction, but is currently engaged in both full-time and part-time employment – taking every opportunity to train and / or gain work experience. She has several ideas about what she would eventually like to do, but is unsure of how to get there and is waiting to see if an opportunity presents itself:

I'm not very happy and my routine job...don't really know where I'm going at the moment... ...I've decided to have more of a challenge. It's just very monotonous, that's all, but we'll see.

[Interview 27]

One other example is of a client who was unemployed at the time of the first follow-up interview after being made redundant from her teaching position in school. At the second follow-up interview, she was employed in various part-time jobs, as a direct result of her capitalising on opportunities that had presented themselves through local networks. The variety suits her current situation:

I'm enjoying my life at the moment, because I'm not having to do a job, the same job, day in day out...I don't have any great desire to back to school teaching... ...I never really knew what I wanted to do and I've always kind of fallen into things by accident or, you know, 'oh well I might as well as do that because it's...' like the teaching.

[Interview 31]

5.3 Career management competencies

Effective career progression requires the development of certain skills and attitudes together with the acquisition and application of relevant knowledge. Two years on from the case study interview, it has been possible to identify some skills and types of knowledge clients acquired that both facilitated their career decision-making and progression. A number of clients commented on how this 'career learning' was a direct outcome of their discussions with the guidance practitioner. It comprises:

- researching employment, education and training options;
- searching effectively for employment opportunities;
- proactively seeking out opportunities;
- demonstrating confidence in their abilities and decisions; and
- awareness of the need to develop new, transferable skills relevant to current and future employment.

A number of clients had developed one or more of these career management competencies. Specifically, eight clients (22%) reported how they have learned to research information effectively and undertake effective job searches. Additionally, nearly half (47%, n=17) now felt they now had a greater understanding of available options, for instance: employment opportunities, vacancies, locations of jobs, entry requirements; education and training opportunities; availability of funding support; types of courses; and competitiveness of jobs and courses.

Two have learned the value of being proactive in seeking out new opportunities. For instance:

...I quite easily will follow things, go and get involved and then kind of leave it go by, but I've learnt over the last two years that you have to be a lot more proactive than that... ...[the guidance practitioner] helped me understand ...that if you put your mind, if you want to do it, you can actually. There are people out there, there are courses out there that you can just go to and say, 'right, things aren't working out as I thought, I'm not happy doing what I'm doing, I'd like to make a change'.

[Interview 1]

Increased self-confidence was reported by nine clients (25%), not only their own abilities, but also in their decisions and choices. This has enabled them to 'get on with it on their own'. Frequently, clients reported how guidance practitioners had 'boosted' their self-confidence.

Finally, a few clients (11%, n=4) had developed new, transferable skills. They had undertaken some form of specific vocational training to help them seek employment or progress in their current job over the last year. This included: health and safety; child behaviour; human resource work; together with written communication skills.

6. Conclusions and issues arising

Researching effective guidance

The qualitative methodology used for this longitudinal study continues to provide an appropriate investigative and analytic framework, providing detailed evidence of clients' trajectories two years after the initial case study interview. Investigating what constitutes effective guidance continues to be complex and multi-faceted, but this study has succeeded in increasing, significantly, understanding of career pathways, career behaviour and career management processes.

Attrition rate of client participants

The attrition rate for participants two years after the in-depth case studies is again low. Data were successfully captured from 36 of the 50 clients (72%) who originally participated. It is evident that researchers and clients have good relationships which are helping the low attrition rate.

Two years on: client qualification level and employment status

The data indicate that the qualification levels of clients have risen over the last two years. Thirty-three percent of clients (n=12) have increased their highest qualification level by 1 level or more, with the majority increasing by 1 or 2 levels (75%, n=9). There has been a decrease in the number of clients in education and / or training in the sample, as some had come to the end of their courses.

Changes in employment status have also been tracked. The proportion of clients who have entered full-time employment over the period since the case study interview has increased. The number of unemployed clients has decreased.

Client reflections on their guidance interview

During the first phase of data collection, 49 of the 50 clients stated that they had found their case study interview useful. Two years on, 72% (n=26) of the 36 clients successfully contacted stated that they still found their guidance interview useful. Fourteen per cent (n=5) of clients are now unsure of the usefulness of the guidance or believe that it has been of limited use. Whilst 14% (n=5) of clients could no longer recollect the guidance they had received. The one client who had not found the guidance interview useful during the first phase of collection now thought that the guidance she received was useful.

Guidance was defined as useful as it: provided valuable insights; helped focus ideas; improved self-confidence; provided opportunities to reflect; and given access to expert information.

What more do clients need?

Just over half of clients stated that they would consider further guidance in the future. Those clients that stated they would return for career guidance to: access and utilise resources for job hunting; obtain further information on different courses; get help with future direction; get advice on application and CV writing; and talk over ideas.

Perceptions of career

The majority of clients in this study perceived the concept of 'career' as having relevance to them. Further, their particular perceptions of this concept involved formal employment patterns rather than employment as autonomous workers out-with organisations, or as self-employed. Those who are currently disengaged from the labour market wished to re-enter and participate in career development. Those at the point of transition to the labour market had accepted the need to invest considerable resources in their own human capital development if they were to succeed in achieving their ambitions of entering career pathways and progressing.

Barriers to career progression

Nine clients in the study are currently disengaged from the labour market and are often struggling with multiple barriers to their progression. In various combinations, these are: health problems; local labour markets and childcare commitments.

Investment in human capital development

A large proportion of clients (n=11) were actively investing in their human capital development, for the purpose of increasing their market value. Most were graduates, who had accepted the need to go beyond their initial degree qualifications to add further qualification and training – even complementing these formal academic credentials with work experience. Consequently they were sacrificing short term gains for longer term benefit.

Career changers

The distinguishing feature of the career trajectories of sixteen of the clients was the career changes they had made in the two years since their initial case study interview. Two types of career changers were identified: strategists and opportunists.

Career decision-making styles

Four distinct career decision-making styles have emerged from the data: evaluative, strategic, opportunistic and aspirational. Findings indicate that many of the clients have been actively managing their careers and progressing their future plans. They have undertaken various activities for this purpose, experienced changes in their thinking and changed career direction.

Career management competencies

Clients were able to identify skills, attitudes and knowledge that have assisted their career development. These included: research skills; job search skills; a proactive and confident attitude; understanding of the need to constantly up-skill. Many clients attributed their newly acquired career management competencies to the guidance practitioners with whom they had worked.

Appendix 1: Two years on follow-up interview proforma

CASE STUDY RESEARCH INTO EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE

PHASE 3 YEAR 2 (2005-2006)

Year 2 Interview Proforma

Introduction:

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

[Reminder – they are participating in a research study that is taking place over 5 years. This is an important study feeding into the current policy making process about guidance – so they can really make a difference!]

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).

Career development and progress over the last 12 months:

Pick up and question any plans that clients talked about doing last year (in the year 1 follow-up).

Are they:

- on a training course;
- in education;
- in employment (full-time or part-time);
- unemployed (on benefits or not);
- undertaking voluntary work;
- on work placement experience;
- redundant.

In particular, has there been any change in their circumstances?

Anything else relevant to the research!

Ask if anyone has influenced their decisions over the last year (i.e. family, friends, colleagues, employers, tutors, a guidance practitioner etc.).

Initial guidance interview (case study):

N.B. Be prepared to recap details of the guidance interview (who, where, when and what action was agreed)

Ask if they remember the interview:

- if not, check whether they have had any further guidance and ask about this; or
- if yes, ask whether they still think it is useful or not.

Ask if they remember what action was agreed after the interview:

- remind client **what** they had done the last time you spoke and probe whether this action has been continued/started/changed.
- was this action, agreed during the initial case study guidance interview, useful in helping them progress, move forward etc; and **how** has this been achieved?

Further guidance:

If the client indicated that they had had further guidance during the year 1 follow-up interview, remind them and check whether they have had any more. Find out:

- where,
- when and
- with whom.

Probe the usefulness, the information and whether any action was agreed.

If relevant, check whether they have completed any CAG programs or undertaken any psychometric test(s). Check usefulness and influence if any.

If any follow-up action was agreed by the practitioner, has this been carried out by the practitioner?

Plans for the next year:

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

What are their next steps in terms of their career?

What support/further guidance/information would really help in the future?

Influence of guidance:

Probe whether they think the guidance they received has been an influence in their actions/progress over the last two years.

- Does the client think this would have happened if they had not seen the guidance practitioner?

Baseline data:

Highest qualification level (check whether this has been achieved over the last two years)

Status (employed full-time or part-time; unemployed; unemployed on benefits; in training or education; voluntary work; caring responsibilities; or health related issues)

Appendix 2: Emergent codes from second follow-up

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

Code	Code description	Number of interviews coded	Percentage of interviews n=36
1	Workplace change influencing client situation	3	8
2	Active plans to start education/training	8	22
3	Plans to move and/or work abroad	2	6
4	Reflection on direction, options taken and plans		
4a	Strategic career planning	4	11
4b	Reflections on choices / direction / decisions	9	25
4c	Aspirational career direction	5	14
4d	Re-evaluation of situation to aid decision	2	6
4e	Understanding of self as a basis for decision-making	7	19
4g	Direction / decisions based on available opportunities	4	11
5	Influence/support from family, friend or colleague	17	47
6	Change in thinking and/or direction	14	39
7	Still in same job/role	8	22
8	Tried to get promotion	1	3
9	Taken redundancy/resigned	2	6
10	Learnt to research and/or find information	8	22
12	Received advice from others	16	44
13	Moved location/house	7	19
14	Undertaken Computer Aided Guidance over the last year	3	8
15	Inactive future plans (i.e. clients discuss their ideas without progressing them)	27	75
16	Positive reflection on initial guidance	26	72
18	Grown in confidence and learnt to be proactive	9	25
19	Started a family	1	3
20	Greater understanding of options/direction/prospects	17	47
21	Received no further guidance over last year	22	61
22	Considering further guidance	19	53
24	In education or training	13	36
25	Learnt new skills over the last year	4	11
26	Unsure about future plans	13	36
27	Active future plans	16	44

28	Caring responsibilities or other commitments on time	12	33
29	Financial barriers/constraints	17	47
30	Suggestions on what is needed	9	25
32	No further guidance needed at present	9	25
33	Received a promotion and/or pay rise	2	6
34	Planning a job change/promotion	6	17
35	Further guidance useful	3	8
36	Applied/applying for other jobs/career change	11	31
37	Plans to start a family	1	3
38	Initial guidance of little or no influence on direction and/or choices	16	44
39	Employed full-time	18	50
40	Received further guidance over last year	9	25
41	Limited or no recollection of initial guidance	5	14
42	Participated in some training/learning activity	8	22
43	No plans to change in future	13	36
44	Further advice from university or employer in future	4	11
45	Completed training/education	15	42
46	Travelled/time-out over the last year	3	8
48	Changed in work situation	8	22
49	Initial guidance still considered useful	26	72
50	Poor health	8	22
51	Further help/guidance failed	7	19
52	unemployed	4	11
53	Initial guidance of limited use	5	14
54	No confidence in government schemes/training/placement agencies	6	17
55	Unable to access training as considered over qualified or too old	2	6
56	Advice from researcher (sought and given)	12	33
57	Seeking employment	5	14
58	Employed part-time	9	25
59	Lack of confidence or apathy to work	7	19
60	Constrained by transport	3	8
61	Participated in voluntary work	4	11
62	Undertaking voluntary work	4	11
63	Continue in education/training	3	8
64	Plans for a gap year	1	3
65	Confusion about IAG provision	2	6