

Whither Practice and Practitioners in Adult Guidance?

By Jonathan Brown (Acting Editor and NAEGA Past President)

In assembling copy for this issue of News and Views, I was very interested in Rachel Mulvey's report on how the 1993 reorganisation of the careers service in England impacted on the practice of careers practitioners (see page 7). Rachel notes, 'the professional imperative to do the best you can for your client sits ill with the managerial imperative to do well enough for all your clients'.

Many working in the more diverse field of adult guidance are facing the results of new transitions with the rolling out of Connexions in England and Careers Scotland. What impact will this have on practice and practitioners in adult guidance? Whatever the answer, much will depend, as Rachel reports, on the 'complex and shifting picture of the lived experience' of each and every adult guidance practitioner.

As a contribution to forward thinking about practice and practitioners, I thought it might be timely to make four assertions about the position in adult guidance. Each assertion is followed by a short commentary. I hope this will be helpful to policymaking by NAEGA and encourage member/reader comment. (As acting editor I wish to be inundated by such comment!)

I Adult guidance demands an inclusive approach to defining its practitioners

In adult guidance for training, education and employment we are dealing with a complex field. It is an area that has developed at the periphery of several spheres of activity and/or professional endeavour. Among the service areas involved in the creation and development of adult guidance are:

- ▶ The Careers Service (which was originally intended only for the young)
- ▶ Education at Secondary Level
- ▶ Community, Adult and Basic Education
- ▶ Further Education
- ▶ Higher Education
- ▶ Training and Personnel (especially since it has moved forward from mere hiring and firing)
- ▶ Libraries and Information Science
- ▶ The Youth Service
- ▶ Voluntary organisations

Practitioners and advocates of adult guidance have emerged somewhat unequally from all of these areas of

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service and professional interest. In the process some practitioners have:

- ▶ moved over into a new profession of adult guidance worker
- ▶ remained to develop adult guidance as a new specialism within an existing profession
- ▶ retained adult guidance as a peripheral activity within their main calling
- ▶ moved into management roles within adult guidance.

What constitutes an Adult Guidance Worker has, in some quarters, become contested territory. Does it consist of all involved or only those involved as full time professional practitioners? Even with pressure to define the adult guidance worker in terms of qualification, I suspect that the contest will remain. So that all involved should be included within the framework. [This is NAEGA's position for membership requirements.]

2 All adult guidance practitioners should have a supervisor (using the model of supervision in counselling).

We need to plagiarise the counselling model to introduce the concept of a legitimised and required peer practitioner as our supervisor. This is not about line management or job appraisal. It is about sharing and reflecting on practice with a colleague to develop and improve that practice.

Sue Copeland provides the best recent description of supervision in counselling, of what is involved and why.

'Outside... a supervisor is someone who has a hierarchical and managerial authority over others... Supervision in the context of counselling is very different: it is a collaborative process with very little power differential... [It is] a supportive learning environment where the counsellor reflects on their work and grows in ethical competence, confidence

and creativity'

(p.387). Copeland S (1998) 'Counselling supervision in organisational contexts: new challenges and perspectives', *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 26 (3) 377-386.

In my view, introducing supervision into guidance would make an immediate, significant and profound impact on our practice.

3 All adult guidance practitioners should have access to regular and systematic Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Much effort and time has been spent in recent years on the development of initial training and of acceptable initial qualifications. We now need to assert the importance of CPD.

4 All adult guidance practitioners should periodically undertake research into and/or monitoring of their practice.

What is being asserted here holds the key to developing evidence-based practice and policy. Practitioner research is being introduced as having a significant role in adjacent professions such as teaching, social work and nursing. And in any case the role is too important to be the monopoly of academics and outsider consultants.

When looking at what happened to careers officers, Rachel Mulvey reports that, "*professionals [found] themselves delivering what they consider to be effective careers guidance despite the target system*". This is a heartening finding even where practitioner control is perceived as weakened.

For adult guidance the adoption of the four assertions would do much to enhance practitioner control of service to clients. That should be our objective. It would facilitate improvements in quality, and allow for the longer-term development of guidance workers making their (our) jobs more rewarding. Let's go for it!