Career support for career developers: a review of the literature

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Career support for career developers: a literature review

1. Introduction

This review will synthesise careers guidance and organisational literature to identify how universities can meet the careers and employability needs of part-time students in employment (‘career developers’).

The review will:

- clarify the career development needs of part-time students who are already in employment
- make recommendations as to the role careers services can play in supporting this development.

2. Methodology

The review is exploratory rather than systematic and seeks to be suggestive rather than comprehensive. Published sources and grey literature were identified through bibliographic searches and by following up references. Search terms focused on part-time students and careers guidance, employability and career development, skill development and work, career self-management, career transition, and career development in employment.
3. Careers and employability needs of part-time students

3.1 Expectations and experiences of university careers services

A 2009 review of the literature on part-time students noted that there was very little information about the experiences of part-time students, and even less about their expectations and experience of career guidance (Callender and Feldman, 2009). This finding led to the development of the Futuretrack: part-time students project, which aimed to improve understanding of part-time students’ career intentions and ambitions. Led by Professor Claire Callender, the research team followed two cohorts of part-time students, surveying them once in 2008 and then again in 2010. The researchers found that while 89% of students reported that their decision to apply to university was linked to their career aims, only a third (32%) had used their university career service when they arrived at the institution (Callender and Wilkinson, 2010). They concluded that part-time students had not felt the need to use their university’s careers service because they already knew what they wanted to do next and could call upon their own employment experience when making career decisions. However, they noted that part-time students continued to seek careers information, advice and guidance from other sources (usually employers, colleagues, family or friends), which suggested that university careers services were not providing the kind of support part-time students needed when they were planning their career development.

Callender et al. (2010) acknowledge that employers may be better informed than careers professionals about career opportunities in their field, but warn that over reliance on employers and colleagues for career advice may be counter-productive if the advice is linked to employers’ short-term organisational needs rather than students’ longer-term career aspirations. They believe that qualified careers professionals can play an important role in balancing organisational advice with more impartial guidance, but argue that universities will need to concentrate more on helping employed students to manage their career development and less on helping inexperienced students to prepare for the labour market if they are to meet the needs of their part-time population.

The Futuretrack findings are supported by findings from a survey carried out by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU), who conducted research into graduate experiences of higher education and employment in February 2011 (Higgins and Redman, 2011). They found that most students (both full-time and part-time) believed that their university’s careers service was primarily designed to cater for students who had never been employed before, and that the services they offered (help preparing applications, compiling CVs, finding jobs and exploring career options etc) were not appropriate for mature or part-time students who already had some experience in the labour market. Graduates who studied part-time while

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1 Futuretrack: Part-time students is a longitudinal study of part-time students in higher education. The project is funded by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and conducted by a research team at Birkbeck College, University of London and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.
working indicated that they had not needed to visit their careers service because they were ‘already well-prepared for the world of work’, and findings from the survey suggested that part-time students were much less likely than full-time students to have accessed careers support through their university².

The literature on part-time students indicates that part-time students are reluctant to access careers support through their university because they do not believe university careers services are equipped to deal with their needs. However, the Futuretrack: part-time students survey found that part-time students do seek careers support from other sources, which suggests that universities may need to re-orientate their careers services away from employment preparation and towards career development if they want to meet the needs of their part-time population.

3.2 The need for personalised career support

Employer support

A survey conducted by Brennan et al. (1999) found that students who had received support from their employer (e.g. contributions towards fees, time off etc) were more likely than those who had not received support to have increased their income, attained greater managerial responsibilities or reported other types of career change. They noted that older students were much less likely than younger students to have received support from their employer³, and that small and medium-sized enterprises were less inclined than larger employers to support their employees through courses of further study. Research conducted by Little et al. (2004) also found that students who were employed by a small business sometimes deliberately avoided asking their employer for support because their company believed that allowing employees to upgrade their skills and knowledge would threaten the business’ stability and undermine its capacity to retain staff.

Motivation

The Futuretrack: part-time students study found that 89% of part-time students reported that their decision to apply to university was linked to their career aim, but researchers did not explore their career aims in much detail. Research by Schuller et al. (1997) also found that over 80% of part-time students had applied to university for vocational reasons, but noted that further qualitative research indicated that while some were motivated by ‘progressive’ vocational ambitions, others were acting more ‘defensively’. Schuller et al. found that part-time students with

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² Only 1 in 5 (20%) of those who studied part-time had attended a one-to-one career advice session with a member of their university’s career service, compared to 1 in 2 (47%) of those who studied full-time. Similarly, while most graduates who studied full-time had visited their university’s careers website (79%) and/or an external careers website like prospects.ac.uk (84%), only around half (53%) of those who studied part-time had visited their university’s careers website and less than two-thirds (59%) had visited an external careers website like prospects.ac.uk.

³ 69% of part-time students aged over 49 and 47% of those aged between 40 and 49 were not receiving any support from their employer, compared to only 20% of those under 26 and 31% of those aged between 26 and 29.
progressive motivations tended to be seeking job advancement, such as pay rises, promotions, a new job or a career change, while those with more defensive motivations had applied to higher education because they were worried about retention or felt their lack of qualifications was a disadvantage when competing for promotion. The researchers described students’ perceptions of the vocational returns to higher education as ‘generalised, long-term and uncertain’, and observed that students rarely knew precisely how or when these returns would occur. They also noted that part-time students who had applied to higher education because they were bored with their jobs were sometimes seeking to increase their personal fulfilment within their current role rather than secure a new one.

**Personalised support**

Tomlinson (2007: 286) has noted that researchers have a tendency to ‘view students in universalistic terms; that is, as rational investors in education who approach the labour market in uniformed and stereotypical ways’. In their review of the literature on part-time students, Little et al. (2005) advised against treating part-time students as a homogenous group, arguing that part-time students are already time-poor and thus need career development activities to be targeted appropriately if they are to derive any real benefit from them. They noted that research by McDowell (1993) suggested that part-time students found development programmes designed to help students develop employability skills frustrating and resented having to spend time demonstrating skills they used everyday at work. McDowell found that employed students felt tutors did not make the best use of their labour market experience, and suggested that institutions should do more to acknowledge students’ employment experience and devise ways of enabling part-time students to reflect on their existing skills and abilities. This would help students to identify ways of developing further skills and prevent them becoming frustrated with programmes designed to teach them how to develop skills they already possess.

Little et al. argue that institutions need to do more to ensure that careers resources reflect the varying needs of the part-time student population, and advise universities to think carefully about the language they use to describe careers activities (e.g. replacing terms like ‘career preparation’ with ‘career development’ and ‘career progression’). They recommend institutions link career development activities organised by the university with those organised by employers (e.g. linking PDPs with performance appraisals), and provide tools which encourage students to reflect on the value of their existing work experience and consider opportunities for advancement.

The literature on part-time students’ experiences of employer and careers support reminds us that while most part-time students enter higher education for vocational reasons, some are pursuing career advancement while others are worried about job security or are seeking to increase their personal fulfilment within their current role. Careers services need to acknowledge the diversity of part-time students’ career aims and provide guidance which takes into account students’ own motivations and experiences.
4. Employability and employment

There is very little in the literature which sets out to explore what employability might mean for part-time, employed students, with only Yorke (2006) acknowledging that students who already have experience of employment will need to view their employability differently to those who are about to enter the world of work for the first time. However, the wider literature on employability suggests that careers services could do a lot to help career developers evaluate and enhance their employability by encouraging them to reflect on their employment experiences to date.

Constructing a narrative of employability

The concept of employability is highly contested, yet higher education institutions are expected to take practical steps to improve the employability of their students. Policy makers and employers often use the term ‘employability’ to describe ‘the skills and attributes a student needs to secure a job with a graduate employer’, but research by Brown et al. (2008) found that, when pressed, employers typically employed a discourse of ‘competencies’ rather than ‘skills’ when describing how recruitment decisions are taken in their own organisation. The researchers suggested that this reflected interviewees’ over-riding concern with performance and behavioural competencies as opposed to qualifications and skills, which indicated that employers were more concerned with applicants’ personal profiles than their skills profiles. A study conducted by Brown and Hesketh (2004), which explored how graduates managed their employability in the competition for ‘fast-track’ managerial positions, concluded that employers were looking for graduates who could construct a convincing ‘narrative of employability’. They argue that definitions of employability which focus solely on skills overlook the fact that employers only attach value to skills and accomplishments when they are packaged as a narrative which conveys a sense the applicant’s character as well.

In his reviews of the literature on employability, Holmes (2001; 2011) recommends that employability should be viewed as a social process rather than an attribute a graduate can possess. He argues that ‘despite the rhetoric surrounding the skills agenda, it is by no means clear that employers should want skills per se; rather, they want the graduates the recruit and employ to perform in desirable ways’ (Holmes, 2001: 112). Describing employability as a possession implies that it is easy to secure employment if you have developed the right skills and attributes, which is unrealistic. Describing employability as a process, on the other hand, enables graduates to acknowledge that employability is a temporary relationship which arises when individuals seeking employment enter into negotiations with the gatekeepers who make the selection decisions. In order to properly prepare graduates for this process, universities need to help students develop ways of negotiating their employability by demonstrating that they are capable of performing the desired role in the required way.

Absolute and relative employability
Brown et al. (2003) argue that employability is both absolute and relative. It is absolute in that an individual can improve their chances of securing employment by developing the skills and knowledge needed to perform a particular role, but it is also relative because their chances of securing employment also depends on the supply and demand of jobs and skills within the labour market. Consequently, ‘employability not only depends on fulfilling the requirements of a specific job, but also on how one stands relative to others within a hierarchy of job seekers’ (Brown et al., 2003: 10). Policy statements tend to concentrate on the absolute dimension of employability, but Brown et al. argue that universities and students need to be aware of the duality of employability because it helps to explain why graduates can be employable and yet struggle to find employment.

Attributes needed to maintain employability

In higher education, employability is often defined as ‘getting a job on graduation’ (Bridgstock, 2009), but this isn’t helpful to career developers who already have a job when they start their course. Bridgstock (2009) argues that graduates need to be taught how to maintain their employability so that they will be able to recognise and capitalise on employment and training-related opportunities for the whole of their working life. Specifically, graduates need:

- **Career management skills** - the ability to: identify realistic and meaningful career goals; identify and engage in strategic work and learning opportunities; understand broader relationships between employment, the economy, and society; identify strengths and address weaknesses by proactively seeking out ways of developing new skills, improving performance, gaining knowledge, securing new roles etc

- **Self-management skills** - the ability to: identify and understand their own values, abilities, interests and goals

- **Career building skills** - the ability to: find and use information about careers, labour markets and the world of work; locate, secure and maintain work; exploit career opportunities; represent themselves in a way that is attractive to employers; create strategic personal and professional relationships.

Bridgstock argues that university careers services should do more to help students develop career management skills, but warns that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ students approach will not suffice because career management is, by its very nature, personal, applied and dependent on the reflective processes of the individual.

Employability in employment

Researchers in Australia have conducted a number of reviews and studies exploring what employability means for adults in employment. Research conducted by Clarke (2007) suggests that individuals need to be encouraged to develop their
employability through their employment if they want to progress their careers. The study, which explored attitudes towards employability among mid-career individuals during a period of career transition prompted by redundancy, found that participants whose previous employment experience had been characterised by secure, long-term employment within stable organisations found it difficult to see what they could offer a new employer and were unsure how to market their skills and experience. They had little understanding of what it meant to be employable or how the labour market operated and were unable to evaluate their own employability. Those who were successful in securing new jobs learned from their experience in the job market and developed the ability to assess their own skills and plan strategies to overcome gaps, identify employment opportunities, and create and use their personal and professional networks. Clarke concludes that there is a disparity between theory and practice when it comes to maintaining an employable population, and suggests that there is a need to identify ways in which employed adults can be encouraged to develop the willingness and the capacity to maintain their own employability.

In their review of the literature on employability, Clarke and Patrickson (2008) note that authors tend to assume that individuals are responsible for their own career management and employability, and fail to acknowledge that many mid- to late-career workers struggle to understand what they need to do to remain employable. Clarke and Patrickson (2008: 128) suggest that ‘to succeed in the new working environment, employees must be extraordinary rather than ordinary; they must be highly motivated and highly marketable; they should have the capacity to evaluate individual strengths and weaknesses in relation to market and employer expectations, the capacity to reflect on those skills and attributes, and the willingness to seek help as required’. They argue that most individuals do not possess the ‘metacognitive’ skills they need to evaluate and market themselves in this way, and identify a need to help employees to develop competencies in self-evaluation and self-promotion.

Clarke (2008) explored the concept of employability in order to suggest how it can be managed at an individual and organisational level. She identified two key questions:

1. How should employability be managed?
2. How can individuals maintain and enhance their potential relative to others in the labour market so that employability is translated into employment?

Clarke noted that employers are often reluctant to help employees prepare for future employment, preferring to offer job-specific training instead⁴. She argues that individuals need to take a proactive approach to their professional development and must learn how to anticipate the skills and experience they might need in the future and adopt behaviours which support this (e.g. engage in learning opportunities, actively manage their career, seek career opportunities).

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⁴ The 2010 Real Prospects survey of employed graduates reported similar findings, with many participants expressing frustration that their personal development needs were being overlooked because employers were more concerned about the present than the future (Higgins, 2010).
Clarke identifies feedback as a critical factor in maintaining employability because it helps individuals to develop an awareness of employer expectations and identify areas for improvement\(^5\). She suggests that individuals should be taught how to seek feedback with a developmental focus from colleagues and customers as well as managers and supervisors so they can learn from constructive criticism.

Clarke suggests that strategies which encourage insight help individuals to assess their current level of employability and then plan for the future. She recommends that processes designed to support employability should take an individualised approach to career development and teach individuals to:

- evaluate their skills and identify their career values
- review their environment so they can assess their employability in the internal and external labour markets (e.g. show them where and how to look for information about existing and emerging employment markets and changing professional requirements, and teach them how to use that information to prepare for future roles and responsibilities)
- seek feedback through formal performance management systems and informal mentoring, coaching or networking.

Research by Clarke (2009) explored how employed adults approached career and employability by examining the career stories of a group of mid-level to senior managers who were undergoing a period of career transition. Clarke identified four types of career managers:

- **Plodders** – who had experienced a traditional career within an organisational framework. They anticipated job security as long as they worked hard and remained loyal to their company. They focused on immediate employment outcomes and any personal development activities were linked to their profession or current position. These employees exhibited little evidence of planning, networking or political awareness.

- **Pragmatists** – who had actively pursued a traditional career within an organisational framework. They believed their organisation offered security, stability, variety and opportunities for professional development. They assessed opportunities for progression as and when vacancies arose within the organisation and were prepared to make both vertical and horizontal career moves in order to progress. These employees had engaged in internal planning and networking activities, but had failed to maintain their employability in the external labour market.

\(^5\) Graduates who participated in the 2010 Real Prospects survey valued feedback because it enabled them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, but many complained that they had not received as much as they would have liked (44% felt they needed more feedback about their performance).
• Visionaries – who had carefully planned and executed their career decisions. They focused on building a coherent long-term career trajectory and were willing to change jobs within and across organisations to access new career opportunities. These employees had actively taken control of their careers, taking the time to plan their next career move and consider how it would fit into their longer-term career plans. They were confident about their employability in internal and external labour markets.

• Opportunitists – who had pursued varied career paths within a range of jobs and organisations. They saw career moves as opportunities to learn new things and gain experience and their interviews were frequently punctuated by the words ‘opportunity’ and ‘change’. These employees embraced opportunities to develop new skills, acquire new knowledge and gain experience in different organisations and industries. They made some career plans, but were flexible and value driven. Opportunitists exhibited highly developed self-assessment skills and were aware of what was happening in the internal and external employment markets.

Clarke found that individuals who perceived themselves to be highly employable and achieved career success had taken responsibility for their own development and adopted a future career orientation, but that it did not seem to matter whether their careers had been unplanned, semi-planned or planned. She argues that rather than focusing on career planning, individuals in employment should be encouraged to develop a future career orientation and adopt behaviours supportive of employability which prompt them to seek opportunities for personal and career development, engage with life-long learning, build their personal and professional networks and develop their self-awareness.

In a review informing the design of an Australian blueprint for career development, McMahon et al. (2003) noted that individuals need to be able to transition repeatedly between learning, work and other life roles. They argue that employability skills frameworks which are developed to meet the needs of employers and businesses overlook individuals’ needs to develop the kinds of life/career skills that will enable them to achieve these transitions. They see careers services as educative rather than directive, and suggest careers professionals should ‘view their clients as lifelong learners and themselves as facilitators of this learning’ (McMahon et al., 2003: 9).

Australia and Canada have both developed blueprints for career development which identify eleven competencies associated with successful career management (Haché et al., 2006; MCEECDYA, 2010). The competencies are grouped into three categories:

• Personal management – the ability to: build and maintain a positive self-image; interact positively and effectively with others; change and grow throughout life
• Learning and work exploration – the ability to: participate in lifelong learning supportive of individual career goals; locate and effectively use career information; understand the relationship between work, society and the economy

• Career building – the ability to: secure or create and maintain work; make career-enhancing decisions; maintain balanced life and work roles; understand the changing nature of life and work roles; understand engage in and manage the career-building process.

The authors of both blueprints argue that careers professionals need to devise ways of helping individuals to acquire, understand and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to fulfil these competencies, and then personalise and act upon their learning.

The literature on employability suggests that career developers need to focus on maintaining their employability by developing an awareness of their situation, aspirations, environment and experience to identify what and how they need to develop (in terms of skills, knowledge and experience) to achieve their career aims. They need to create a narrative of experience which effectively communicates their employability to employers and find ways of demonstrating their potential as well as their capability.

5. Career development in employment

5.1. Career self-management

In 2010 Brown et al. conducted research into patterns of working and career development in Europe. Researchers conducted interviews with participants from ten different countries, most of whom were full-time, permanent, mid-career employees working in skilled, associate professional or professional occupations. Exploring how individuals had progressed in their careers, they found that career developers needed to be able to identify the opportunity structures and pathways within their sector or profession (i.e. access to new opportunities) if they wanted to progress in their career. They argue that career practitioners need to offer services which help individuals to reflect on their experience and develop greater opportunity awareness, and that services must resonate with an individual’s motivation and career orientation.

When Brown et al. asked respondents how they had acquired the knowledge and skills to perform their current job, they found that over 60% had learned through carrying out challenging tasks, 55% had identified their own learning opportunities through self-directed or self-initiated learning, 52% had acquired valuable knowledge and skills from colleagues at work and over 30% had acquired knowledge through engaging with clients. Almost 50% reported that life experience had helped them to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to perform their current role. Researchers noted that the most successful career developers had taken responsibility for
identifying and creating their own learning and development opportunities, and
identified an urgent need to help individuals become more reflective in order to
identify ways of meeting their own individual development needs. They argue that
this is particularly important for employees aged 45 and over as these employees are
less likely to receive careers support from their employers.

Brown et al. identified six key processes which were central to skills development a
work: engagement with challenging work, interactions at work, knowledge at work,
supporting learning of others, self-directed learning and work, and developing
identifies at work. They suggest careers practitioners can help adults employed in
skilled or professional occupations to take responsibility for their own learning and
development by:

• Helping them to develop a coherent career narrative detailing where they
  have been, what they are doing, and where they are going
• Encouraging them to be reflexive about their approach to learning,
  effectiveness as learners and they way in which they learn
• Helping them make sense of their own learning, career development and
  future aspirations
• Helping them to identify what they have already learned and achieved, as
  well as what they still need to learn

Research exploring the effectiveness of career guidance found that employed adults
particularly value opportunities to reflect on their current circumstances and
possible futures with impartial careers professionals (Bimrose et al., 2008). The
longitudinal study, which took place over five years between 2003 and 2008, drew
on a series of qualitative interviews with clients and career practitioners in order to
explore how guidance might add value to post-compulsory learning and enhance
employability. Researchers found that guidance was perceived to be especially useful
when it:

• provided access to specialist information and expert networks (e.g.
  information about local labour markets; information about training and
  employment opportunities)
• provided insights, focus and clarification
• increased self-confidence and self-awareness
• motivated clients to progress ideas, explore options or try new experiences
• provided structured opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Respondents identified a number of career management competencies they felt had
assisted their career development, including:

• improved ability to search for and research employment, education and
  training opportunities
• the ability to be proactive in their approach to transition
• the ability to demonstrate confidence in their abilities and decisions
• awareness of the need to develop new, transferable skills.

Researchers also found that clients continued to seek careers information from other sources (identified through their personal networks), and used these contacts to access feedback, support and specialist information.

Bimrose et al. (2008) and King (2001; 2004) are critical of models of careers guidance which fail to promote awareness of the wider economic and political contexts in which clients are operating when they make career decisions. King argues that careers guidance should help career developers understand that their circumstances are socially situated and that social structures or barriers can both help and hinder their career development, but that individuals can also negotiate their position by adopting behaviours associated with career self-management. King (2001) drew on literature on individual behaviour in organisations to suggest how careers professionals could help employed adults to develop career self-management skills. The author’s framework for guidance comprised four key components:

1. Charting the institutional landscape
2. Identifying gatekeepers
3. Implementing career strategies
4. Evaluating the effectiveness of career strategies

We have described the King’s framework in detail because it suggests how career developers might benefit from careers activities designed to develop these competencies.

*Charting the institutional landscape*

This requires individuals to understand the political culture and context of the organisations in which they operate/seek to operate. The boundaries of the landscape will depend upon the circumstances and ambitions of the individual (e.g. someone hoping to progress into senior management in their current organisation may need to focus on the political culture in their own organisation, while someone acting as a technical consultant might focus on the culture in their industry, which would include prospective employers or clients and professional bodies).

Individuals seeking to understand their institutional landscape must gather intelligence about opportunity structures and decision-maker profiles. In order to identify opportunity structures, individuals must develop an awareness of supply flow (how employers fill vacancies) and assignment flow (how employees secure roles through attributes, credentials, skills and performance). In order to develop an understanding of decision-maker profiles employees must identify which individual(s) decide who progresses into which roles. King also suggests how individuals might access this information (e.g. reviewing job adverts, business plans, researching organisational provision for career planning, seeking advice from contacts, reading trade press).
Identifying gatekeepers

Once career developers have identified the individuals who control their career outcomes (whether internal e.g. current line manager or external e.g. prospective employer) they need to understand how these gatekeepers make their decisions (e.g. what a prospective employer is looking for in an employee, how to convince a line-manager to invest in training). They can then use this information to understand what they need to have (e.g. in terms of credentials, social capital, skills etc) or do (in order to acquire these credentials, social capital, skills) in order to secure their desired outcome. This process should also prompt individuals to reflect on their career goals as they determine whether or not the desired outcome is attainable.

Implementing career strategies

King identifies two types of career strategies: influencing and positioning. Influencing strategies require individuals to engage in: self-promotion (presenting themselves in a favourable light); ingratiation (seeking to persuade others to like them), and upward influence (negotiating with employers to secure favourable terms of employment). Positioning strategies require individuals to: develop their networks (thereby improving access to information, advice, support and opportunities); think strategically about their job choice (making moves which offer the opportunity to acquire new credentials or experience, leverage existing skills or access gatekeepers); invest in professional development (through training or education); be innovative in their existing job role (develop skills, knowledge and networks by enlarging one’s current job role). King argues that different strategies are more effective in different situations, so career developers need to be learn how to assess the nature of the situation and the organisation before deploying a strategy.

Evaluating the effectiveness of career strategies

Once individuals have some experience of deploying various career strategies, they need to seek feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of their behaviour. Sources of feedback include: achievement or otherwise of desired outcomes and verbal or non-verbal cues provided by gatekeepers. Career developers need to be able to judge a) if the strategy was deployed effectively and b) if the strategy was the best way of achieving the desired outcome.

King suggests that impartial careers professionals can play an important role in facilitating career self-management by:

- helping clients to identify and evaluate career strategies they have used in the past
- helping clients to identify gatekeepers and discussing how these individuals make decisions and how employees might influence these decisions
- helping clients to identify which career strategies might be most effective in which organisations or situations
• helping clients to understand the broader political and social contexts within which they are operating and how they might negotiate these realities and take ownership of their career.

She argues that it is important that individuals feel confident about their ability to manage their own careers because people are more likely to adopt these behaviours when they feel competent to do so.

5.2. Identifying and accessing careers support

Brown et al., Bimrose et al. and King all conclude that adults in employment need to develop and utilise their personal and professional networks if they are to access the information, support and opportunities they need to achieve their career aims. The final section of this review will examine two studies which have explored networking in more detail.

Research conducted by Bosley et al. (2009) investigated how ‘career shapers’ (people who provided career support, advice or opportunities) shaped employees’ careers. The authors identified five categories of career shaper:

Advisers (offer suggestions)

Advisers offered opinions, suggestions or recommendations which subsequently shaped participants’ careers. They helped participants to clarify their career direction and/or take action in pursuit of a career idea or aim, and offered their view of organisations, occupations and the wider world of work. Advisers included: professional careers advisers, manager, colleagues, friends and family members.

Informants (offer knowledge)

Informants provided information about job vacancies and insight into occupations without deliberately seeking to influence participants’ views of these. Informants often had first-hand knowledge of the occupational area under discussion. While advisers provided insights into how career development could occur, informants provided information about job content, organisations and the world of work. Informants included: friends, family members, managers, colleagues, training staff.

Witnesses (provide feedback)

Witnesses communicated their perceptions of the participants’ skills and personal qualities. Their views of careers shaped the way participants saw themselves in employment, which in turn informed their career aspirations and direction. Witnesses included: managers (most common), education and training professionals, colleagues, family members and HR personnel.

Gatekeepers (provide opportunities)
Gatekeepers had the power to provide or deny access to jobs, promotions or development opportunities.

*Intermediaries (intervene with others)*

Intermediaries exerted influence with another person (usually a gatekeeper) on the participant’s behalf. Their influence was derived from their social or organisational position and they often used information social systems to circumvent formal ones.

Bosley et al. found that engaging in dialogue with members of personal and professional networks facilitated employees’ ‘[negotiation with and navigation through] the structural environments in which they were situated’, but that different career shapers affects individuals’ career learning, aspirations and actions in different ways. The researchers noted that the help was often practical and directive rather than reflective, and suggested that careers professionals could help employees to identify and access this kind of support by teaching them how to recognise possible career helpers and assess what these individuals can (and can’t) offer.

Kidd et al. (2003; 2004) conducted research with employees to explore what they felt constituted effective career discussions. They found that half of effective career discussions were not linked to any formal HR process, and those that were tended to have taken place in semi-formal settings (e.g. mentoring sessions or one-to-one meetings) rather than formal HR meetings (e.g. performance appraisals). Forty per cent of effective career discussions had taken place as part of an ongoing support relationship, but nearly a third (30%) were with an individual the participant did not know very well.

Useful career discussions included those which:

- challenged individuals’ views of themselves, perceived constraints to their development or their reasons for making a particular career choice
- broadened individuals’ thinking about careers
- provided specific advice about a particular activity or occupation
- enabled individuals to talk to people outside their employer (often people who had knowledge of broader career issues through their own experience)
- provided opportunities to talk to senior people who could provide opportunities or had the depth and breadth of experience to offer useful advice.

Respondents reported that effective career discussions resulted in a variety of positive outcomes, including: self-insight, awareness of opportunities, job move, development opportunities, greater political awareness about internal processes, and improved career skills.
The authors argue that careers professionals need to recognise and support the fact that employed individuals often talk about their careers as part of their everyday, organisational life. They suggest that clients should be encouraged to:

- take active steps to seek feedback
- be open and assertive when discussing their needs
- take responsibility for managing the discussions
- use appropriate questioning and probing to understand what the giver is saying
- be prepared to engage in a certain degree of self-disclosure
- respond positively to feedback - learn how to evaluate it and decide how to use it (or if they decide to disregard it they should be able to justify this decision)
- prepare for discussions in advance.

The organisational literature suggests that part-time students in employment would benefit from careers guidance which facilitates career self-management and equips students with the skills and knowledge they need to identify and access employment and development opportunities, sources of careers support, and information about internal and external labour markets. This would enable students to feel confident in their ability to negotiate and navigate the employment environment in which they are situated.

6. Conclusion

‘[Career development] it is no longer a question of gaining credentials in order to climb bureaucratic career ladders, but of maintaining one’s employability, of keeping fit in both the internal and external markets for jobs through the acquisition of externally validated credentials, in-house training programmes, social contacts and networks’

(Brown et al., 2003: 23-24)

The literature on the career development needs of part-time students and employed adults suggests that part-time students in employment would benefit from impartial careers guidance which supports career development by facilitating career self-management and employability maintenance. While most part-time students enter higher education for vocational reasons, some are pursuing career advancement while others are worried about job security or are seeking to increase their personal fulfilment within their current role. Careers services need to acknowledge the diversity of part-time students’ career aims and provide guidance which takes into account students’ own motivations and experiences.

Recommendations
This review of the careers guidance and organisational literature suggests that university careers services can best support the needs of part-time, employed students by:

- providing personalised careers support which takes into account their career aims and employment experiences
- identifying links between career development activities organised by the university and those organised by employers
- helping students to develop a compelling narrative of employability
- helping students to understand the political and economic contexts in which they are operating and educating students about the broader relationships between employment, the economy and society and the situated nature of careers
- helping students to develop a future orientation and adopt behaviours which will help them to maintain their employability e.g. encouraging students to review their environment in order to improve their understanding of internal and external labour markets and identify employment and development opportunities, create strategic personal and professional relationships, and identify and influence gatekeepers
- helping students to identify different sources of careers support and specialist information, seek feedback and engage in effective career discussions
- providing opportunities for students to reflect on their employment experience, skills and knowledge in order to identify avenues for development.
Bibliography


