
The Reforming
CAREERS
coordinator

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The idea of 'Reforming Careers Work' comes from an enquiry into how the careers-work coordinator's role is developing in the changing conditions of contemporary life. The enquiry uses a survey of 150 school and college careers coordinators, speaking of what helps and hinders their work.

The reforming coordinator is a person who develops careers work locally on the basis of needs which are identified:

- in a particular school or college - with its staff and management;
- in that neighbourhood - with its culture and economy;
- with these students - among their families and social groups.

The study sets out a framework for examining how you can develop a professional understanding of such needs, who should be involved and how useful reform the work can be kept in motion.

Careers education and guidance is about who gets to do what in our society. It has wide-ranging importance - to individuals and their families as well as in the economy.

Recent developments in careers education and guidance have extended the range of activities beyond the two-fold provision of 'careers education' and 'guidance', linking them to a deeper and wider range of curriculum activity. That is, perhaps, why the more inclusive and unified term "careers work" is increasingly used.

You now have further options for improvement, more than at any time in more than two decades. The bases for that reform rest on your appreciation of change:

1. in the global economy and its impact on your neighbourhood;
2. in policy interest for linking learning to the working world;
3. in how your students and their families seek workable bases for dealing with change in their lives.

The case for reform is directed at school or college. No other institution is remotely in a position to help people learn to manage change:

- change both in the global economy and in neighbourhood experience is continuing, accelerating and accumulating;
- people increasingly need to learn to resolve the issues from their own inner resources;
- these resources include skills, but skills are significantly interwoven with feelings

- these feelings are rooted in family and neighbourhood experiences, often stemming from early life;
- dealing with all of this makes a difference to what a person does - and can do - not only as worker but as consumer, citizen, in the group and in the family.

The survey enquires into what you can learn in order to help you do your work. Its findings are set in the context of the change factors set out above. It leads to the development of ideas about how a coordinators' work can be expected to develop further and how that development can be supported.

factors for reform

What follows examines background facts, on:

1. how working lives are changing;
2. how both people and policy are concerned with this;
3. how curriculum best supports these concerns.

It does not just argue for more careers work, but raises questions about what kind of careers work is needed - and what kind of staff development best supports that work.

1. working lives

The causes of change are extensive. That 'big picture' must take account of politics, economics and technology. But the consequences for your people are up-close, where communities, families and individuals deal with change.

At both levels, social inclusion is a pressing issue for career management. Table 1 draws the 'big picture' as a spectrum.

table 1
a spectrum of opportunity

the 'included'	the 'vulnerable'	the 'excluded'
employees and securely self-employed	temporary or out-workers, in training or re-training	no paid work or no training

The key for inclusion is said to be high levels of employability. But, at closer quarters, you may find variations in all three parts of the spectrum:

- Some students live where little work of value is on offer.
- Some actively reject what is offered, finding what – to them – seem better ways of coping.
- Some have taken in, from childhood, a culture of ‘non-employment’.
- Feelings significantly colour the picture of how they see things - and some of these feelings reinforce stereotypes.
- So-called ‘career information’ may seem remote to them, and even to be ‘spun into image and enticement – which they may distrust.
- They gather much career-related knowledge informally and interpersonally - both locally and from the media.
- They learn much in early childhood - long before school-leaving comes into view.
- Respect for peer group, family and neighbourhood makes a difference to what they learn - and are prepared to learn.
- Some see the loss of respect and social attachment as more important than loss of employability.
- Many of your students, and the people they know, experience increasingly frequent interruptions in their working, social and domestic lives - so that routines are lost, attachments broken, and skills are no longer seen as useful.
- The social and personal ways in which they develop an enduring sense of a valued self is changing - in extreme cases, for some of your students, they can disintegrate.

Some of your students will experience much of this. All of your students will experience some of it. In order usefully to respond to such experience a coordinator must concern him or herself with issues which are deeper and broader than a preoccupation with skills and employability

‘Skills’ and ‘employability’ have been the focus for public concerns for careers work, in a range of government interventions, over more than two decades.

2. concerns

However, the most recent intervention is Connexions - which locates careers advisory work in a new multi-agency and regionally-based organisational framework.

A central role in this new service is that of personal adviser - it is a wide-ranging role. It will move beyond the paper-and-pencil tests, computer programs, data bases, careers libraries and structured

interviews that are routinely associated with “guidance”. Indeed, it is designed to take account of your students’ working lives as:

- grounded in family and neighbourhood experience;
- infused with feelings about self and work – many of them painful, some of them damaging;
- based on early learning, some of it first framed while they are toddlers.

At such close quarters the Connexions advisory role will need to reach deeper and wider into what is happening.

Your school or college can make corresponding changes to its programmes. It can offer students help in examining, articulating and planning their lives from this deeper and broader perspective. A reforming coordinator would seek to catalyse such changes - and to base them on local experience.

3. curriculum

Until recently policy concerns for curriculum have been focussed on what children learn and how well they learn it. These are ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ questions about curriculum, and they express a concern for standards. They are answered by the evidence of targets which are met and in test results. But these are not the only important questions: ‘why?’ questions raise issues for purpose, meaning and motivation in what your students learn. They are questions about the relevance of learning. They are answered by finding out how students use their learning in their lives.

There is now a loosening of central control on curriculum, releasing room for new development. At the same time the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) emphasises the need for links between learning and life. Careers work, and personal social and health education come up in this context; as does education for citizenship, which will be a compulsory requirement from 2002. These three broad areas of learning relate to students’ roles as citizen, partner, parent, householder and consumer - as well as worker.

The new thinking is significant. It makes no distinction between “academic” and ‘applied’ knowledge; it validates both what is known in schools and in the community; it sees all knowledge as a resource for living; and it acknowledges that a person’s working life is increasingly inter-dependent with all the other facets of her or his life.

This offers reforming coordinators radical options for making deeper and wider links between their work and the resources of both mainstream curriculum and the community.

The case for such change is explicitly acknowledged in the proposals concerning Connexions and the ideas coming from the QCA - particularly concerning education for citizenship.

Because the full extent of the possibilities has not been set down in detail in either set of proposals, reforming coordinators' options for local development are quite open.

What follows summarises coordinators' ideas and experience concerning their work. It is taken from the evidence of the survey questionnaire. It suggests that a coordinators' work is:

1. diverse, offering a range of bases for local development work;
2. sometimes supported in this role by staff development, and sometimes not;
3. calling upon a distinctive range of qualities of credibility in the coordinator.

Careers coordinators undertake a wide range of local negotiations in an increasingly pressurised school-or-college climate. In principle, open learning can offer useful support to such work. It is flexible about the timing, location, range and pace of development. It can also enable direct links between staff-development and local action. This may be why open-learning-based programmes are commonly used.

In responding to the questionnaire, coordinators reflected upon a list of tasks. As table 2 (page 6) shows, the list is wide ranging. In some tasks coordinators felt they had received staff-development help, in some they did not.

The term "staff development" means more than "training"; it includes mentoring, consultancy, open-learning and learning-from-experience as well as training. This is how coordinators learn for their work. Some of this learning is crucial to the reform role, because - without it - a coordinator would not be able to find a locally informed base for knowing what to do.

However, staff-development help with some of these tasks is said to be easier to find (ticked). With some it is harder to find (crossed).

And so, some crucial tasks are more supported, and some less.

bases for reform

1. the range of tasks

2. staff-development support for the tasks

Table 2:
The coordinator's tasks and the help received

participation in school or college policy development - working with management and governors	X
diagnosing local and school or college-based needs as a basis for further development	✓
action research - for understanding local conditions and experience	X
"staff" development for colleagues and partners in the community – to enable understanding and operation of the programme	X
resource-centre work – developing arrangements for holding learning material and making it available to students	✓
providing for guidance and support for individual students - whether from school staff, careers advisers or personal advisers	✓
arranging for reporting, recording and action planning progress-file work – for learning and self-presentation purposes	X
providing for teaching careers education in classrooms – by designing, team-building and development work	✓
involving mainstream teachers – to include career-related learning in their lessons and to use their knowledge in shared timetable space	✓
involving students' families, local employers and other local people in the design and review of the programme	✓
networking with other schools and colleges - both within own sector and between sectors	X
administration work - such as maintaining records, organising timetables, conducting correspondence	*
professionally coordinating the whole activity - into an appropriate, effective and sustainable programme	✓
programme evaluation - as a basis for improvement and for gathering evidence of value	X
time management - to fit all of the foregoing into their own working days, months and years	*

Among the crucial and more supported tasks are:

- diagnosing local needs;
- designing, team-building and development work;
- involving mainstream teachers;
- involving local people;
- coordinating an overall programme.

Among the crucial but less supported tasks are:

- action research;
- policy development;
- human-resource development;
- networking with other schools and colleges;
- programme evaluation.

There is a something here for designers and providers of staff development to consider. You might also consider how, with the help of your professional association, you can help and be helped by others - including your community partners.

Finally, there is on the original list some tasks (starred) that staff-development will not much help. The need here is for better institutional support. This is, of course, a matter for management - to which the study will later turn.

Like heads of subject department, careers coordinators support the standards, position and delivery of their work.

But the list of tasks set out above has distinctive features. Careers coordinators work with a range of partners. They need to focus on locally-relevant purposes. They manage progress at various delicate stages in the development of work which is shared with partners. They need to be alert and responsive to change, not only in the careers-work field but in the changing conditions of the labour economy and its significance for the local community. Their partners in the work include teachers; but they also include community partners - who are usually helping voluntarily. And so, compared with HoDs:

- In working relationships with colleagues the structure of accountability is looser and the need for goodwill greater.
- In working with neighbourhood and community the dynamics of influence are even more subtle.
- Concerns for local needs means that a great deal of the programme must be designed, adapted and developed locally.

3. the distinctiveness of the coordinator's tasks

- Timetabling arrangements are varied, needing continuous negotiations with HODs, mainstream colleagues, senior management as well as community contacts.
- The range of learning settings is wide, so that school-or-college and community-learning settings must be integrated into a coherent programme.
- Careers work needs to be kept visible and under constant review, in a process of on-going re-positioning with all stakeholders - and all of this is in response to change.

The nature of this work suggests that you would not necessarily be able to rely exclusively on any position of seniority. Your personal and professional credibility would be critical. The study also returns to this issue.

routes to reform

What follows summarises what the survey finds about the way staff development helps:

1. staff-development programmes help coordinators move towards re-orientation of their thinking - this is a learning experience;
2. coordinators need to achieve credibility in the school or college - this is a matter of developing ideas with managers, colleagues and partners;
3. these two processes to be linked, so that what happens in staff development supports what must happen in the school or college.

Reform is about achieving impact; and impact means making a difference which is:

- appropriate – it meets local needs;
- sustainable – it can be maintained in the school or college;
- effective – it enables students in useful learning.

1. what happens in staff development?

The results suggest that learning requires a re-orientation on the part of the coordinator. Getting to what is appropriate, sustainable and effective requires the coordinator to reorganise the way she or he thinks about the work. The enquiry finds no easy way - there is a "pain barrier" (it might mean that you would have to leave your "personal comfort zone").

Table 3 sets out coordinators' ideas about how staff development can help the whole process.

Table 3:
'the road to reorientation'

The process involves...

...**becoming alert** - eyes open to new purposes and possibilities for development



...**developing range** – deeper and wider views of the work



...**establishing confidence** - positive feelings about self



...**sharpening motivation** – positive feelings about the work



...**identifying priorities** - focus on what is important in this school or college and its neighbourhood



...**engaging in active reflection** – time and concentration to re-examine what has been done - and is now suggested



...**dealing with the pain barrier** - movement through and beyond difficulty and confusion



...**accomplishing reorientation** – understanding and clarification of ideas for new action.

It is a stage-by-stage process, indicated in the table by the arrows. Nothing is inevitable; it takes time and trouble - and it needs help. The result is a thought-through basis for change.

Coordinators report that direct and personal help from tutors and peers are most significantly helpful.

Though necessary, the process is not sufficient. Because, even where it is achieved, it does not guarantee credibility. That needs further attention - locally.

2. meanwhile, in the school or college!

Table 4 (page 11) sets out that parallel process.

The story here is of developing knowledge, gained from staff development, into local knowledge - for local use. It means working with local stakeholders.

Coordinators say that the help of careers advisers, mentors and line managers is most helpful in this respect.

However, they express mixed feelings about the usefulness to their work of senior managers. There is more about this later.

3. making the links

The challenge is to run 'central' staff-development programmes which enable local use of knowledge. The challenge is also to enable local cultures to welcome this. This building of links between learning and action is critical to reform. The enquiry's detailed suggestions for improvement in such links are set out later. But, first, we examine the role of management.

Table 4:
'from here to credibility'

The process involves...

...importing learning - applying learning
experience to development work
in the school or college



...sharing process – adapting staff-development
processes for colleagues, partners and
other stakeholders



...adding to expertise – by action research and other
means, further developing the depth and range of local
understanding



...gaining recognition - finding local acknowledgment
where it can be found, and
building from this



...raising profile – extending positive visibility for your
work and role - among students, their families,
colleagues, community partners and your managers



...establishing credibility – working on being a resource for
problem solving and effective new action in the school or
college, a person seen not only to be able but useful.

supporting good management

To summarise what follows - the survey suggests:

1. credibility does not come for the asking, it must be won;
2. winning credibility is as much the responsibility of the coordinator as the manager;
3. much hinges on the relationship between staff development and the school or college.

All commentators agree that management is a critical factor for the reform of careers work.

1. The 'careers- work catch'

A common assumption is that senior managers are the primary cause of improvement in school or colleges - if they don't support it then it can't get much better. The underlying belief is that managers, in one way or another, significantly enable coordinators... or disable them.

This is not necessarily so: some coordinators seem to be effective without much management support; and some senior managers need help in understanding what is worth supporting.

There are, then, primary causes in both management and coordinators. And this is the catch: success first needs management support, but management support first needs help. The catch will not be released by demanding help for causes whose worth has not yet been demonstrated.

Senior managers are themselves under pressure; they will not distribute resources to work which cannot be seen to justify more expenditure. The relationship between coordinators and their senior managers is, therefore, both critical and subtle.

2. three views from coordinators

In the survey coordinators have as much to say about senior managers as about anybody. They make three kinds of statement:

- hopeful - that management support will be forthcoming;
- disappointed and, at times shocked - by lack of support;
- self-propelled - unwilling to wait for management support.

The third group of coordinators finds ways to progress without explicit management support, and uses success in this work - step-by-step - to gain management support. They are, so to speak, 'jiggling' the careers-work catch.

There are two realisations here: (1) besieged senior managers cannot support what has not been shown to be worthwhile; (2) coordinators must identify the specific aspects of careers work which are locally worthwhile.

There are plainly many school-and-college variations in what may be thought to be 'worthwhile'. But - in all cases - a thoughtful coordinator will do this work better, a credible coordinator will do it with more success, and no one but the coordinator can do it.

The, possibly uncomfortable, reorientation here is this: it is not the senior manager but the coordinator who may well be the primary cause of improvement.

The enquiry finds reform moving well for some coordinators, and, for others, not moving at all.

It suggests that the focuses for improvement are for better links between staff development and school-or-college. Without that bridge from idea to action no reform is possible.

It suggests four important links:

1. induction and portfolio work;
2. relating policy and theory to local needs;
3. developing mentoring;
4. using appropriate programme-management strategies.

Each of these suggestions supports careers coordinators in the entry-and-re-entry transitions between staff-development learning and their work.

Induction and portfolio work can be improved by:

- using both to offer participants an opportunity to reflect on their past practice;
- using both to help them consider new purposes for their own work;
- using both to help them to see what engaging in learning is going to require of them;
- providing for the use of portfolios in both learning and development work;
- introducing portfolios early, with support for managing them for planning and development work;
- using both induction and portfolios to bring new learning processes into the school or college.

3. making better links between staff development and school or college

Work on theory and policy can be improved by helping coordinators to:

- see whether and how theoretical and policy ideas set out useful outcomes for their particular students;
- recognise where such ideas can expand and deepen useful learning;
- recognise and clarify what the real-life outcomes of this learning can be;
- understand which of these ideas can be realised in the present programme;
- see where they require new programme development;
- know what that is.

Professional mentoring can be improved by finding mentors who can:

- offer an independent but professional perspective;
- link what is proposed to the realities of the school or college;
- focus help on specific tasks;
- anchor proposals to other aspects of the on-going work of the school or college;
- try out and pilot ideas and actions;
- develop each task as a series of targets for personal action – so that each knows what they need to do;
- sustain the interest of senior managers in the work.

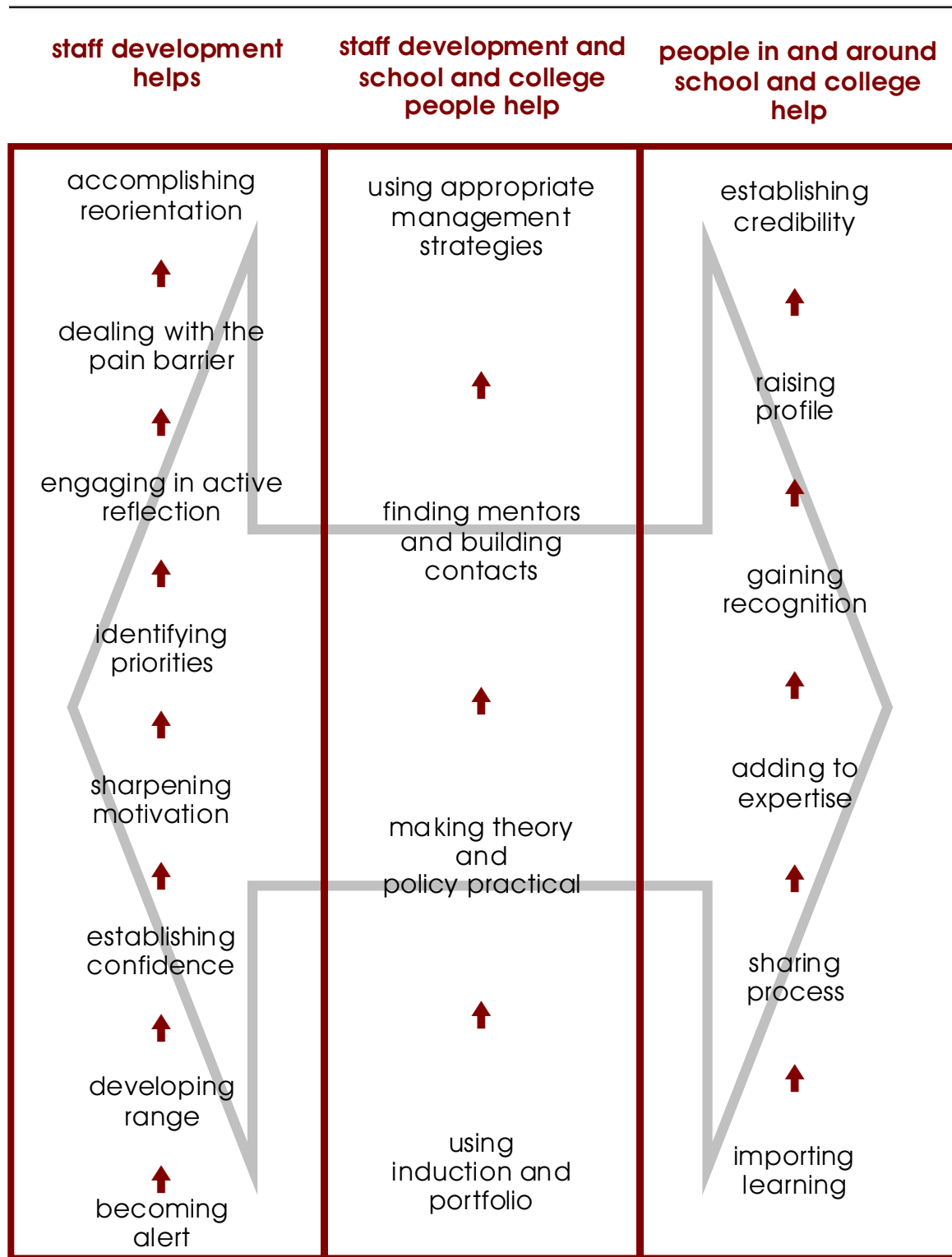
Programme management by coordinators can be improved by:

- attending to and taking account of the range of stakeholder concerns;
- basing suggestions for action on an understanding of the school or college, and what is already being done;
- knowing how to make acceptable use of expert knowledge - whether of theory, policy, evaluation or research;
- helping stakeholders - with information, ideas, resources and support - when they need it;
- winning commitment and negotiate agreements for voluntary help and support;
- providing opportunities for stakeholders to reflect on their experience in the programme;
- establishing firm expectations, when feasible and appropriate.

a model for reform

All of these suggestions build a model for reform, in which staff-development people, coordinators and their stakeholders each have key roles. Table 5 (page 15) sets out the elements from Tables 3 and 4.

Table 5:
Achieving appropriate, sustainable and effective reform



The table adds the four key linking elements in the middle column. It shows their interdependence - the reforming coordinator moves between them in reaching bases for local action.

Young men and women must achieve effectiveness and fulfilment in a world which is both global and local and in which work and citizenship will increasingly overlap. That learning is as dynamic and complex as anything in the school or college curriculum. Marginal notions of 'careers education' and 'guidance' will not help much.

Proposal for Connexions and Education for Citizenship are, at the very least, an acknowledgement of this. But these DfEE and QCA proposals are not being spelled out in operational detail. There is room for the independent local development. The role of the reforming coordinator is to catalyse and support such development.

Useful material

- Department for Education and Employment: Careers Work. Sheffield, DfEE, 1999 (the open-learning pack).
- National Association for Careers and Guidance Teachers. Effective Management for Careers Work – Getting Reform for Open Learning. London: NACGT, for the Career-Learning Network, 2000 (the full report of the enquiry - also available on the NACGT website <www.nacgt.org.uk>).
- Other related material can be obtained from – The Career-Learning Network, The Old Bakehouse, Elsworth, Cambridge CB3 8HX, phone: 01954 267619, e-mail: <billaw@macline.co.uk>.