

ETHICAL PRACTITIONER- LED RESEARCH

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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- The practice of a career development practitioner must be in line with the values of the sector
- By extension, any research undertaken by the practitioner-researcher must uphold ethical values
- This presentation will highlight how a rigorous dedication to ethical research can promote our sector
- I will use my PhD thesis as an example of these processes in action, wherein my methodology focused on ethical practitioner-led research





RESEARCHER BACKGROUND

- Working in higher education in careers and academic roles since 2004
- Supervisory team: primary supervisor [Prof Mike Danson](#) (Heriot-Watt); second supervisor [Dr Jim Campbell](#) (GCU)
- Project began in September 2014 (application March 2014) as part of the [Skills Development Scotland PhD](#) programme
- Interruptions, employment and changes in direction but the project and support have moved with me
- Lecturer, [MSc Career Guidance and Development](#), University of the West of Scotland since 2016
- Teaching, practice and supervision focus on equality, diversity and inclusion in career development



THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL RESEARCH IN OUR SECTOR

- The research competence of a career development professional is closely related to their promotion of the career development sector
- Lax values in a researcher risk bringing the sector into ill-repute
- If you are promoting yourself “as a member of...” then you must embody the values of that organisation in your research work
- Separation of research from guidance practice
- Independent stance from employing organisation



RESEARCH IN OUR SECTOR:

GOING BEYOND BASELINE EXPECTATIONS

- A rigorous commitment to ethical research is both expected of and upheld by higher education institutions
- Research outside of this context should also adhere to the same standards for validity and robustness
- The ethical values demonstrated by a researcher impact upon their own professional reputation and that of any institution, organisation or professional body to which they are affiliated
- Research must be able to stand up to external scrutiny:
 - Specific recording tools may help in this respect, such as a publicly available GDPR-compliant data management plan: <https://dmponline.dcc.ac.uk/>
 - Within a university environment, research proposals must meet ethical approval, outwith this can you gather robust peer feedback on your research plan?



RESEARCH IN OUR SECTOR:

OUR ETHICAL PARAMETERS

Your position as a member of the career development profession must shape your upholding of rigorous ethical values in research:

- professional bodies issue ethical codes relevant to accredited members
- these codes take all aspects of practice beyond legal compliance and bring with them a requirement for ethical and moral sensitivity



SKILLED ETHICAL DECISION-MAKERS

- The career development practitioner has unique strengths which can be harnessed in research practice
- Ultimately ethical practice is the continuous attention to the upholding of ethical values, and explicit reference to these values when faced with an ethical dilemma
- Ethical practice is not a one-off accomplishment and cannot be measured by a researcher's declaration that they "abide by", "adhere to" or "comply with" ethical criteria
- Ethical practice goes beyond legislative and organisational compliance
- We are skilled in this area, as guidance practitioners
- Duty of care: professional boundaries and signposting



BUT, WE ARE NOT AUTOMATICALLY GOOD RESEARCHERS

- Our professional qualifications may or may not have included research methods training
- Particular caution should be exercised in relation to qualitative research
- It is easy to perceive similarities between interviewing for explicit data collection purposes in qualitative research and one-to-one career guidance/career counselling interventions, and much consideration is given within the literature of both fields to the interview process and setting
- Both the career guidance and research interview offer a confidential environment in which data are conveyed by the interviewee for interpretation by a skilled interviewer, with clear parameters

There are problems, however, inherent in overstressing this as a shared position

- The qualified career development practitioner does not have an *intrinsic* ability to produce robust and authentic academic research within a qualitative research environment
- It is essential for a practitioner-researcher to also undertake research training; basic to advanced CPD depending on the scope of the topic being researched



MY PHD

Explores gender atypical career decision-making that leads to an individual undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship in a framework or sector where there is a known and significant gender imbalance.

Wider value to our sector and explicit decisions made in relation to CIAG research:

- Contribution to theoretical knowledge of gendered career decision-making
- Promotes the value of career guidance and development practitioner-led research
- Use of mixed methods design in the field
- Contributes to a growing body of doctoral and post-doctoral research into career guidance, career development and career education



EXAMPLES OF EXPLICIT CIAG- SECTOR RELEVANT ETHICAL CHOICES

- I mapped research against the 11 points of the Career Development Institute's Code of Ethics:
 - Accessibility, Accountability, Autonomy, Competence, Confidentiality, Continuous Professional Development, Duty of Care—to Clients, Colleagues, Organisations and Self, Equality, Impartiality, Transparency and Trustworthiness (Career Development Institute, 2019a).
- I described how the ethical considerations for the research project were adopted and integrated within the research using the ethical guidance explicitly for career development professionals as practitioner-researchers presented by Johnson and Neary (2016):
 - informed consent, coercion, incentives, withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality, risk assessment, debriefing, and confirmation.



PROMOTING PRACTITIONER-LED RESEARCH

- **Advocate** for the value of our position:
 - We must advocate for the value of practitioner-led research within career education, information, advice and guidance
- Consider the **broader value of our research work**, from a methodological perspective:
 - What does the work add to the sector in terms of knowledge about process as much as about the topic of the research itself?
- **Publish and share** on our work:
 - Example article for practitioner-researchers in Career Matters, on how the points of the Career Development Institute's ethical code map on to practitioner-research
 - Conference presentations
 - Professional networks



References

Career Development Institute (2019a) *Code of Ethics*. Available at:
[https://www.thecdi.net/write/Documents/Code of Ethics update 2018-web.pdf](https://www.thecdi.net/write/Documents/Code_of_Ethics_update_2018-web.pdf)
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Johnson, C. and Neary, S. (2016) *CPD for the Career Development Professional*, Bath:
Trotman.



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An extended recording of this presentation is available at:

