

Taking a critical perspective on career and career guidance

Setting the conceptual framework for COCAG



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Wednesday 21st May 2025

Manchester



For discussions of work and politics... where else?

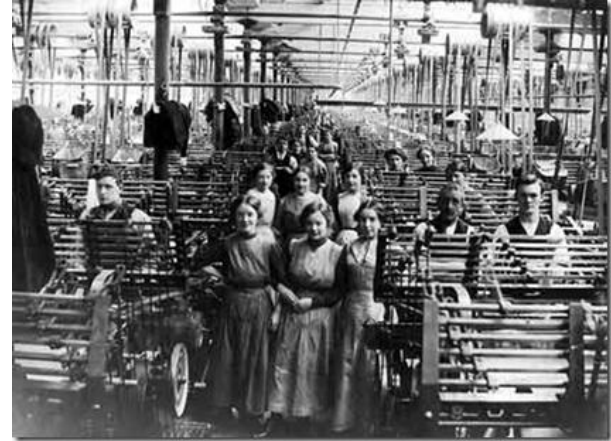




Among these dark Satanic mills

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant land.

William Blake, 1808



Are we living in dystopia?



Yet in a world of plenty some are doing just fine



\$425 billion



\$107 billion



\$640 million



\$60 million



Estonia



Togo



Dominica



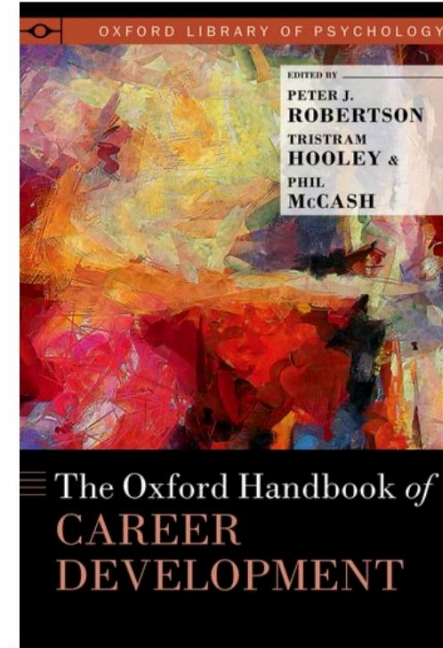
Tuvalu

In such a world, does it make sense to waste time talking about career?



What is career?

Career is not a single moment of decision when we choose one job over another. It is deeply woven into the ongoing fabric of our lives. Our careers are conducted continuously, and they develop in social and political contexts that provide contrasting opportunities and limitations. Career is all around us and there is no escape from it, because it describes the coming together of our life, our learning, and our work. Career is important to the lives of individuals across the world and to the societies in which they live.





Career is not just about paid work

Career as a sociological lens



Thinking about career is about understanding how we live in an imperfect world (and try to change it)

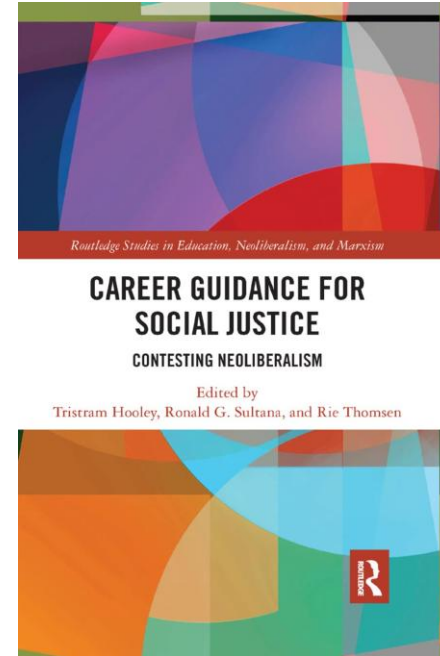


Can career guidance intervene into this



What is career guidance?

Career guidance supports **individuals and groups** to discover more about work, leisure and learning and to consider their place in the world and plan for their futures... Career guidance can take a wide range of forms and draws on diverse theoretical traditions. But at its heart it is a purposeful learning opportunity which supports **individuals and groups** to consider and reconsider work, leisure and learning in the light of new information and experiences and to take both individual and collective action as a result of this.



The politics of career guidance



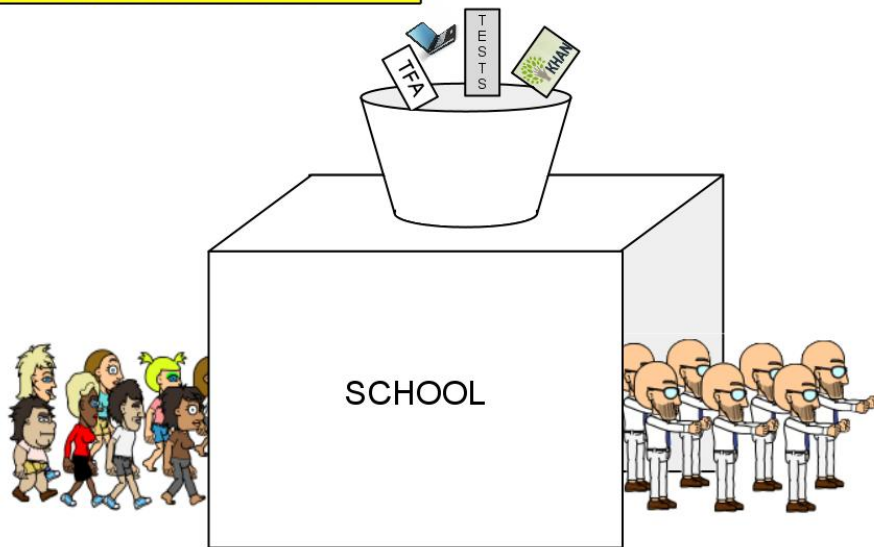
Careers education and guidance is a profoundly political process. It operates at the interface between the individual and society, between self and opportunity, between aspiration and realism. It facilitates the allocation of life chances. Within a society in which such life chances are unequally distributed, it faces the issue of whether it serves to reinforce such inequalities or to reduce them.

Tony Watts

Career guidance can do many things



THEY DISCOVERED THAT IF THEY ADDED JUST A PINCH OF SALT,
SCHOOLS PRODUCED 10,000 MORE ENGINEERS.



You can create whatever you want.
You just have to know what you
want and take the opportunities as
they come your way. We are who we
choose to be.

— Will Smith —

Sultana's rationalities of guidance



Technocratic

Developmental

Emancipatory



So, what does this emancipatory career guidance look like



Chronister & McWhirter's study of career development with victims of domestic abuse



Women have to have the opportunity to develop skills and advance their situation economically.

This means supporting them to develop and implement their career aspirations.

Increasing their awareness of community support and group identification

Engaging in power identification through exploring how domestic abuse happens and analysing the power dynamics

Critical self-reflection through journaling and discussion

Exploring the gendered labour market

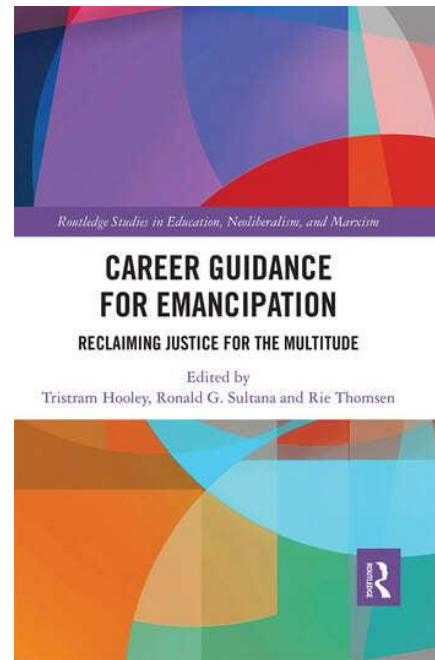
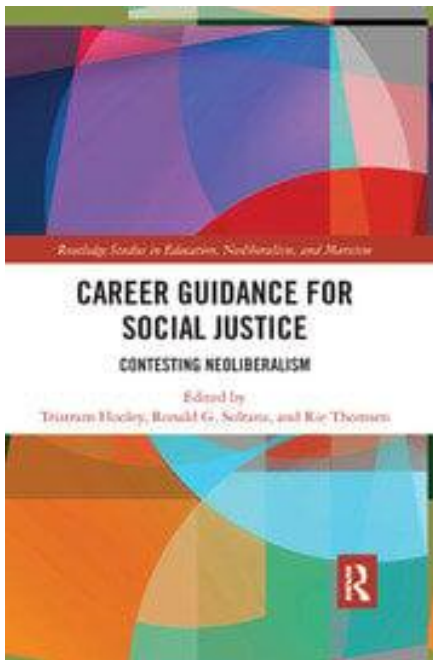
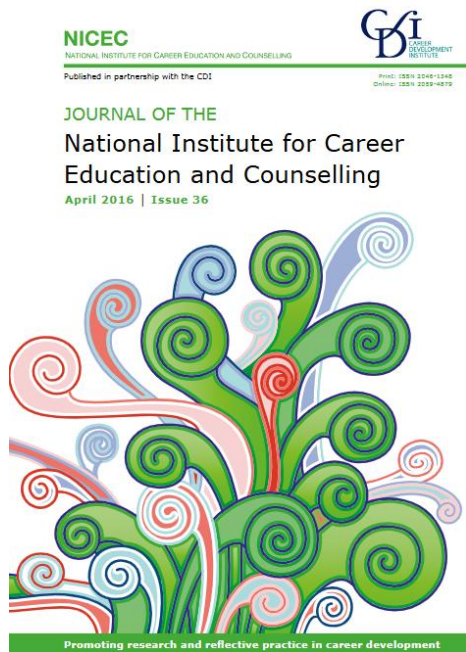
In the context of a higher education careers module.

Decoding the 'linguistic gender coding' in job adverts.

Examining different levels of confidence and behaviour from women and men when applying for jobs.



Alongside editing collections about career guidance and social justice



The five signposts towards socially justice career guidance



Build critical consciousness

- Help people to understand the situation, not just to react to it on a personal level.



Name oppression

- Help people see injustice and organise in solidarity to access a decent career.



Question what is normal

- Spend time discussing what normality means and whether it is necessarily desirable.



Encourage people to work together

- Facilitate social interaction and collaboration



Work at a range of levels

- Intervene into individual, group, organisational, social and political systems.



We find this emancipatory perspective underpinned by critical theory



Understanding critical theory



Critical



Negative

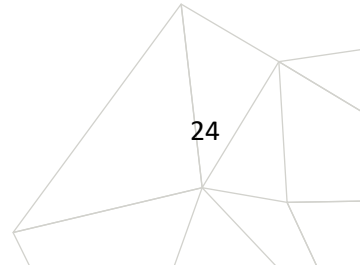
The Frankfurt school



A range of politically engaged theoretical perspectives



Marxism / Feminism / Queer theory / Post-colonialism
/ Post-structuralism / Radical humanism /
Intersectionality / Critical race theory / Ecocriticism /
Critical disability theory / New historicism /
Existentialism / Phenomenology / Governmentality /
Actor-network theory / Indigenous critical theory / And
many more...



This inspired a special issue of the BJGC



Critical perspectives in career guidance research

British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 2022, 50(4).

13 papers addressed careers, career guidance and critical theory



Critical psychologies

- Using critical psychology in analysis of career guidance and counselling
- The hegemonic psychological discourse and its implications for career counselling and psychological intervention
- A critical review of contemporary concepts of agency in the field of career guidance: life-design counselling and a systems theory framework

Relational sociologies

- Co-agency: reconsidering agency in guidance practice
- Navigating the matrix: career development and the responsabilisation of employability in Australia
- Towards intersectional and anti-racist career guidance
- Empowering newcomer workers by addressing racism and xenophobia: a promising pilot

Postmodern discourse theories

- On epistemic justice in career guidance
- Examining career transition narratives through the lens of social justice: a critical study of the British Press
- Problem representations of employability in higher education: using design thinking and critical analysis as tools for social justice in careers education
- Using phenomenology in careers research: student experiences of unpaid work
- Building a radical career imaginary: using Laclau and Mouffe and Hardt and Negri to reflexively re-read Ali and Graham's counselling approach to career guidance

And led us to a summary of critical perspectives

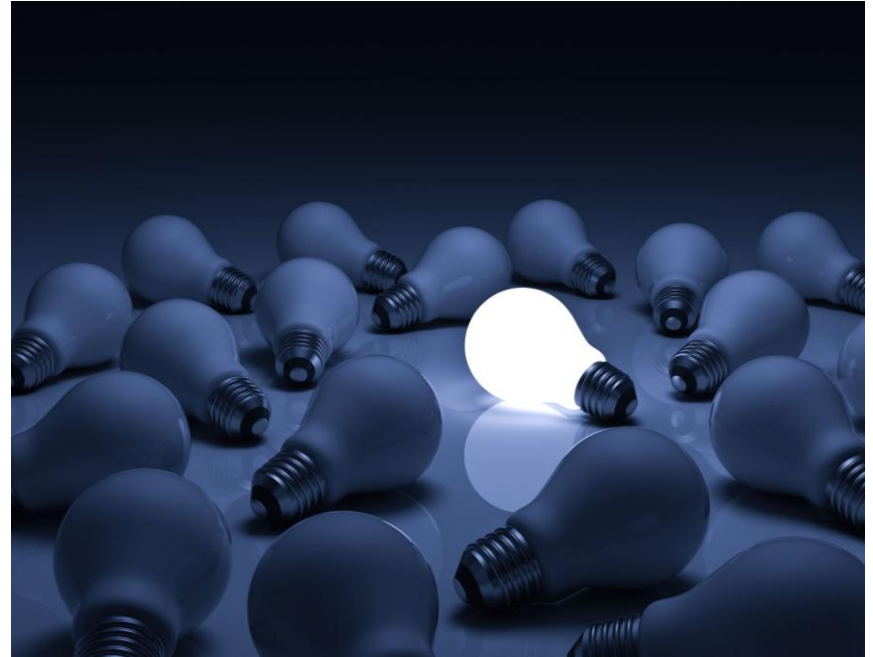
Build a radical imaginary

Address the use of power

Unmask ideology

View the individual as existing in a dialectical relationship with their context

Recognise that human beings have a bounded but transformative capacity for agency



Enter COCAG



Critical perspectives on career and career guidance



Critical perspectives on career and career guidance (COCAG) will gather scholars across Europe and beyond to explore how careers are changing in the contemporary world and consider what response is required from public policy and practice. It will explore the following research questions.

1. How can the challenges and changes that are happening to careers in the contemporary world be understood?
2. How can policymakers respond to contemporary challenges to individual's careers?
3. How can career guidance practice adopt a more critical stance to address the changing world more effectively?



Action challenge / Main aim



COCAG encompasses a multifaceted approach to achieve its primary objective of critically examining careers and career guidance in the contemporary world. This comprehensive strategy can be broken down into four key pillars.

1. Establishing an open and inclusive network for collaboration
2. Developing resources and toolkits for best practice
3. Stimulation of opportunities for COST ITC and Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI)
4. Training and education initiatives

What I would like to characterise the network



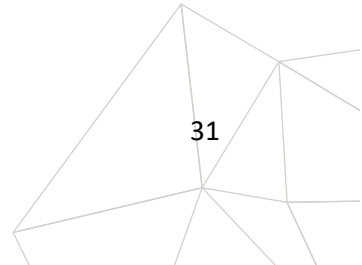
Dialogue

Community

Solidarity

Action

Empowerment



What I hope this network will achieve...



Theory

Strengthening the critique of existing career theory

Shift from critique to proposition

Development of new critical career theories

Research

Stimulation of new research informed by critical perspectives

Creation of evidence for the utility of critical perspectives

Policy

Finding a basis on which to engage with policy around critical perspectives

Engaging green and new left parties in the concept of career

Practice

Building stronger frameworks for practice

Stimulating an explosion of critical practices

Organisational

Moving from periphery to centre in the institutions of career studies and career guidance

Reflecting on day one in Manchester



Careers in crisis

- Capitalism in crisis> Shifting labour markets> Globalisation and nationalism> Precarity, unemployment and work intensification



Lifelong and lifewide learning in career

- Educational crisis> Formal and informal learning> The interaction of education work and other life spheres> Transitions



Socio-technological careering

- Automation> Digitalisation> Surveillance> Digital enclosure> Human-centred systems



Difference and career

- Diversity> Vulnerabilities> Inclusion> Place> Culture> Community



Career imaginaries

- Possibilities for a better world> Transformation> Wellbeing> Decent work> Social justice

How do we understand what is happening in relation to each of these themes? What is driving this? In whose interest? And what can be changed?

How are policymakers responding to these issues? Why are they doing this? How does this intersect with career guidance? What other possibilities exist for policy? How can we influence this?

How do these issues impact on practice? How can practice address them? Where are the difficulties and challenges? What approaches offer more possibilities?

What theories, theorists, concepts and ideas should underpin our work?





What can we do?



Events / seminars /
workshops / conferences
(virtual and physical)



Training and
development



Collaborations /
mentoring and
mobilities



Scientific publications
(articles / special issues /
books)



Other types of
publication and outreach



Funding bid and future
projects

THE WEBSITE ([HTTPS://COCAG.CO.UK/](https://cocag.co.uk/)) CAN SERVE AS A REGISTRY AND CLEARING HOUSE FOR THESE ACTIVITIES. EVERYONE IN THE NETWORK HAS TO BE EMPOWERED TO LEAD THESE ACTIVITIES.

WE ARE LIMITED IN FUNDING BUT NOT IN IMAGINATION.

Every snotty street-fighter of a radical philosophy...

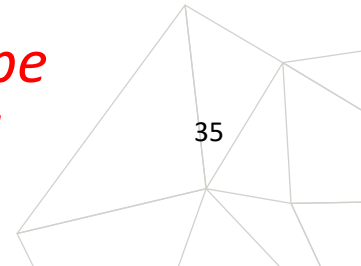


Manchester changed the world's politics: from vegetarianism to feminism to trade unionism to communism, every upstart notion that ever got ideas above its station, every snotty street-fighter of a radical philosophy, was fostered brawling in Manchester's streets, mills, pubs, churches and debating halls.



Stuart Maconie

Perhaps critical career theory can be the latest in this long line of radical philosophies....



Thank you





About me

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<https://cocag.co.uk/>





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