

★ Labour Market Indicators: not a shortcut for crushing dreams

The Editor thanks Russell George, who has kindly allowed us to reprint his article about 'the numbers', and what they mean for careers in a UK secondary school.



Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) has always been a strange beast for people who deliver careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) to wrestle with. At what point during a client's impassioned description of how the cash will soon be rolling in from the YouTube views of his stop motion animation videos (actual example) should you raise your hand, clear your throat and kick down the door of this (sometimes scarily) well thought out vision to let in the cold light of reality?

An article in SecEd in May 2013 entitled "Is University the best preparation for the future?" by the Head of an independent girls school, Marion Gibbs, bemoaned that this conversation doesn't happen often enough and we need to stop the treadmill of students into Higher Education (HE) courses which do not lead to employment.

She recounts listening to a radio program about three recent graduates who were all struggling to find employment in their chosen fields of study:

"A recent radio programme focused on the efforts to find employment of three out of work young people. One had a degree in journalism with media and cultural studies, another a degree in drama in the community, and the third had a diploma in ocean science. All had very specialised qualifications, which appeared to relate to specific jobs and careers, but their courses were so specialised that they may actually have closed doors, not opened them.

"Most news organisations recruit students with high-quality degrees in subjects such as English or history and politics, augmented by a post-graduate journalism course. Arts in the community have been badly affected by spending cuts and many organisations are now staffed by volunteers. And a diploma in ocean science does not carry the kudos of a science degree. These young people had applied for huge numbers of jobs without success; all were working as volunteers in some capacity, but growing increasingly disheartened. One wonders what careers advice or guidance they had received..." (Gibbs, 2013)

It's that last sentence which crystallises a lot of recent comment about LMI and its use with learners trying to pick their way through the ever complex array of routes out of education and into employment. This expectation is that, if those students had heard the right advice and been made aware of the prevailing winds of the job market, they would never have chosen those HE courses and never have dared to dream the dream of working in journalism or studying the wet stuff that covers 70% of the planet.

But I think that's a misleading assumption of what LMI could do and the role it can play in guidance.

It doesn't have to be a roadblock. It doesn't have to be a dissuasive element to certain career areas. It doesn't have to be the end of an aspiration.

It can be the ignition for a new possibility. It can be a door opener for a new direction but it also can be, for those careers mentioned above on that radio show and many like them whose future employment numbers will be decreasing, a clear indicator of the barriers that will have to be

overcome to achieve success. It can be a motivating influence to those students to work harder, achieve better qualifications, network more and gain more work experience to rise above the large number of competitors for a smaller number of jobs.

Would those students say that they went into their HE courses with their eyes open to the test of finding connected employment afterwards? I don't know, but it doesn't necessarily follow that LMI would or should have stopped them running up that particular hill.

LMI can be a positive influence on career choice and should be celebrated for it.

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References:

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