

## ★ Career development across the lifespan needs policy

Sam Young bewails what she sees as ignorant and uninformed government policy and foolish decision-making imposed on Careers New Zealand.



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Lifelong careerist, Tony Watts, is a great proponent of career development as a system within society. He was a great proponent of career guidance as a public good.

Watts feels that one of the measures of a 'successful' society is one which takes a national stance of "career development services as a system". An optimal system takes a long-term view of career, develops strategies for society and individuals that benefit all (2014, p. 2).

From the individual's perspective, this would be "as seamless as possible", so, although there would be sub-systems to serve specific needs – like career guidance in schools, or in retirement villages – all aspects of the system would be unified with a common purpose (Watts, 2014, p. 2).

In many countries, New Zealand included, career guidance has been largely provided as a government service. Because of this, having a supportive, strategic and long-term public stance on career development is critical to the appropriate delivery career development services (Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010).

Australia has a national career policy. The Australian Government defines career development as "the ongoing process of a person managing their life, learning and work over their lifespan. It involves developing the skills and knowledge that enable individuals to plan and make informed decisions about education, training and career choices" (2013, p. 3).

Further, this policy is underpinned by belief that career development is not something that happens once. It explicitly states that career development begins "at school and continue[s] throughout life, including: transitioning from school to further education, training or work; entering, re-entering or changing employment; and transitioning to retirement" (Australian Government, 2013, p. 4).

In New Zealand, we didn't ever get to a national policy statement, which has proved to be unfortunate. It has left us unable to hold our government unaccountable for the delivery of career services, and the erosion of those services it once supplied.

The New Zealand government's – unquantifiable – career strategy has been largely delivered through Careers New Zealand (CNZ). CNZ was considered internationally to be an ideal for countries to aim for. Kiwis had a dedicated government department which focused on, and resourced, transition and development.

From an outsider's uninformed perspective of CNZ, I feel that over the past decade, where CNZ once focused on the lifespan, their service has been hollowed out to a point where they only just have the capacity to support career development in secondary schools.

Our once proud ship became a stripped and beached shell.

Then, last week our government, instead of appropriately resourcing CNZ and refloating her, have towed her into a backwater to die. She has now been rafted up alongside the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

I feel that the message this mooring sends is that career development only happens at a single point in time: CNZ is a one-stop shop for when you leave uni with your freshly minted degree. The likely impression will be that no one other than uni graduates needs career development.

How has New Zealand's thinking become so narrow when others, 'like us', have become so aware? The EU is working towards a continent-wide harmonisation strategy. Australia and the UK take the view that career development increases social inclusion, while Canada focuses on career development to reduce labour market polarisation (Hooley & Barham, 2015). We too need career development as a social driver in New Zealand. We need to harness our human desire to help and be a functional part of society.

We need career development services across the life-span so that New Zealanders are happy societal contributors. We need career development that covers primary, secondary, tertiary, working life, retirement and third age careers.

Further, we need career development as an economic driver: to keep us engaged and fulfilled in our working lives, which must last past retirement age. As a society we cannot afford to pay the 15 year average pension that we will be in retirement (instead of the 3 we once lived past retirement when we first set the age 65 bar).

How effective will TEC be at reaching that growing segment of third agers (tipped to be 20% of the population by 2030; Statistics NZ, 2013)?

The OECD states that nations must “build policy frameworks for lifelong guidance which are capable of integrating a range of interventions associated with different life stages and sectors into a coherent lifelong system” (McCarthy & Hooley, 2015, p. 1). They explain that development of national strategies with policy responsibility shared by the multiple stakeholders is effective for economic growth and societal sustainability.

All I can see is our New Zealand government apparently luffing blindly with no life jackets and the sun in their eyes, oblivious to the fact that our friend and neighbour nations have formed a magnificent armada beating to windward, with eyes wide open and sextants at the ready.

I am deeply saddened by the lack of understanding our government has shown of what career development is, and how it serves society. I am also unhappy that we CDANZ members were unable to influence this outcome.

And the worst thing is that I don't know where we go from here.

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