

Careers Advisers - Their Qualifications and Standards.

People usually expect those they consult for professional help to have undertaken appropriate training, and been declared competent. Parents, for instance, rightly think their son/daughter's teachers have studied their specialist subject(s) at university, and been instructed in educational skills.

Few parents, however, know how Careers Advisers (CAs) come to occupy their position, or the nature of their expertise. Despite this, most are expected to accept from them information and advice which may significantly influence their son/daughter's life. This article aims to show that you, as a parent, need have no fears on this score.

Any CA your son/daughter meets up to age 18 will hold the Qualification in Career Development (QCD). This is obtained via a postgraduate-level course lasting one year full-time, or two years, part-time. Full-timers tend to come directly from a first-degree course, or following a relatively short period of employment after it.

Conversely, many part-timers are already employed by a careers organisation, but in an ancillary role, such as employment assistant. Some CAs hold the Diploma in Careers Guidance (DCG), having qualified before the QCD was introduced; however, their diploma is of equal status, and most are very experienced.

In some settings, you may encounter staff who have become fully qualified as CAs via formal work-based training and linked home study arranged by their employer. The assignments they must pass to progress are judged by qualified outside assessors, and may come under the banner of an Apprenticeship or NVQ (details of which feature elsewhere on this website).

Some staff may hold only a Level 4 Careers qualification, which entitles them to offer clients information, but not guidance. Rest assured that they will not exceed this remit, and if guidance is required, will refer the enquirer to a CA holding Level 6 (or equivalent).

Those attracted to careers work typically consider helping others a strong professional motive. However, you needn't rely on this, as several key principles underpin CAs' training and daily activities.

They include:

- Putting the needs of the young people they see ahead of the school or college within which they work, or the service which employs them.
- Offering information, advice and guidance as fully and helpfully as possible, but without favouring any option or organisation.
- Taking all reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy of the information they provide.
- Respecting confidentiality, except where passing on information is done with the client's agreement, or where (in very rare instances) divulging this is legally required.

Most CAs working with the 13-19 age group belong to a professional body called the Career Development Institute (CDI). It sets standards of ethical practice, lobbies government on their behalf, and ensures that the content of university careers courses is appropriate. It

encourages members to update their skills through formal and frequent training, and those who do are listed on its Register of [Career Development Professionals](#), and may put 'RCDP' after their name.

All CDI members are eligible to attend its Annual Conference, and receive its quarterly journal, 'Career Matters', which includes articles covering issues relating to employment, training and education, designed to keep them up-to-date.

It is common practice among CAs to attend college open days and information sessions offered by universities. Many also have formal or informal links with apprentice training providers and/or major employers in their area, and often become knowledgeable about smaller ones through work experience programmes run for the students in their schools.

A recent and long-needed overhaul of careers provision for the 13-19 age-group has resulted in a framework called the Gatsby Benchmarks. Under 8 main headings, these are standards towards which every secondary school must work. To ensure this, it appoints someone in authority, with the title of Careers Leader, to be responsible for its introduction and progress. This has considerably strengthened the position of CAs in schools, who are no longer hampered by the wide variations in careers education provision (and even ideas of what this should be) which used to exist there.

Numerous and often complex factors contribute to how people make career decisions. This means guidance is not an exact science, and completing training still leaves practitioners considerable discretion. A number of theories about decision-making have emerged from academic research, which trainee CAs discover and debate. Few, however, adopt any 'wholesale'; rather, these amount to a tool often proving useful in diagnosing a young person's needs, or helping him/her towards a career goal.

For any students they see individually, CAs normally produce an Action Plan. This briefly summarises their interview, and (crucially) says what the young person should do next. Recommendations may include reading specified information, arranging work experience, or visiting a sixth form/ college/ university. The CA's workload may permit an automatic follow-up to check progress, but if not, a teacher usually undertakes this. The CA retains a copy of the student's Action Plan, and gives one to the school/ college. Any further documentation may (at least partly) be at the CA's discretion.

Some CAs are attracted to accredited research, but usually after some time in the job. This makes choosing a topic of real interest, and/or which complements their professional role, more likely. A master's degree (leading to the award of MA or MSc) is the popular option, but those who like the 'long haul' may try for a doctorate (leading to Phd or DPhil).

CAs working in higher education (HE) are a separate group. Many, however, have previously worked in schools and colleges, and completed the training already described. They have their own professional body, the [Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services](#) (AGCAS), which offers high-quality training, and addresses issues pertinent to their role. They are part of the support network available to your son/daughter if he/she goes to university.

Independent CAs also exist. Most operate individually, or in very small concerns. Of course, they charge for their services, but can be consulted on more than one occasion, and their information and back-up service are often excellent. Like AGCAS members, most have 'cut their teeth' in a school or college service, or a university.