

Key Skills Associated with Effective Careers Support

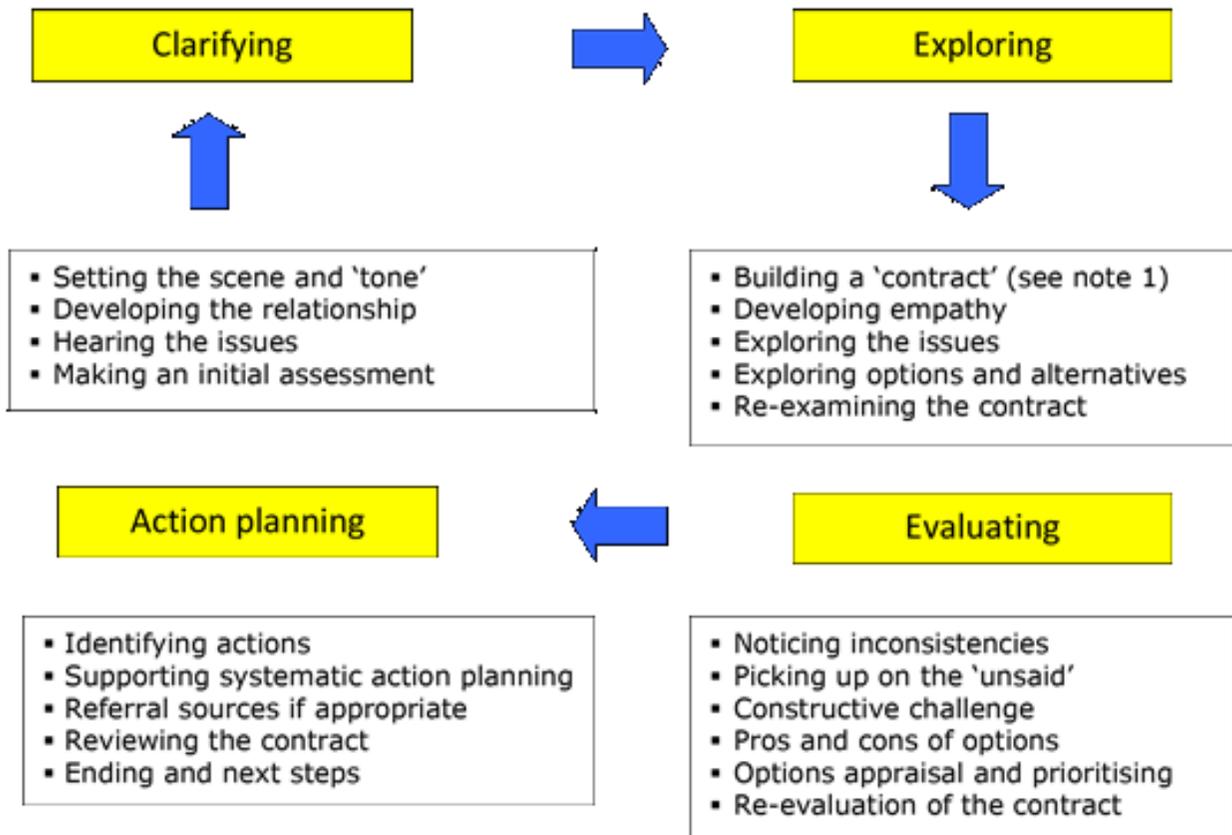
This structure and model of guidance comes from the work of Lynda Ali and Barbara Graham (1996) in their extremely popular book ‘The Counselling Approach to Career Guidance’. It is a simple method of structuring a careers conversation whatever the level and degree of career awareness of the trainee. Other helpful models and framework can be found in the further reading references at the end of this document.

10 key reasons to use a model

1. Provides a **clear structure** that is likely to be different to other conversations you may have with other roles/responsibilities
2. **Paces the conversation** appropriately – and helps to manage the time available
3. Helps to **manage expectations** on the part of the trainee – the trainer/helper is not expected to and is unlikely to have all the ‘answers’ or information
4. **Professionalises** the conversation – effective guidance isn’t just about ‘having a chat’
5. Without a structure there is a **danger that the conversation loses direction**
6. Avoids any tendency to **adopt a more directive approach** or **provide inappropriate/too much information**
7. **Acknowledges that everything can’t be ‘sorted’ in one go**, thus helping to manage a consistent process with their trainee over a period of time
8. **Demonstrates there is a process** to career planning and development to the trainee; makes it easier to notice whether the trainee has moved their thinking on in some way and thus **can be quite motivational**
9. **Allows their trainer /helper to notice/observe behaviours and feelings** and to work with these during the conversation
10. The model is developmental rather than linear; **you may need to move back and forth between the various ‘stages’** in order that the trainee feels they have been able to progress their career situation in some way

Discussions should be underpinned by the following foundation skills (for a summary of foundation skills used in guidance, see Ali and Graham):

Active listening	Non-Judgemental	Developing trust
Impartiality	Understanding and interest	Immediacy
Empathy	Skilful questioning	Interpreting
Effective use of silence	Observation (verbal and non-verbal)	Appropriate self-disclosure
Paraphrasing	Summarising	Effective provision of information
Reflecting	Restating	Challenging (e.g. beliefs/feelings/attitudes/perceptions)



Note 1 – 'contracting.' In order to use the time to best effect during a career conversation, there needs to be some kind of agreement as to what can realistically be achieved in the time allowed. Getting to this stage of the process can happen fairly early on during a career conversation, while for other trainees this can take some considerable time.

For example, it may be fairly common that trainees present several issues or it could be that the presenting issue isn't in fact the most important to be worked on as the conversation develops. Building this initial 'contract' and agreement shouldn't be rushed as it can make any subsequent work less effective or at worst, completely meaningless for the trainee.

Useful summaries, along with the use of foundation skills of listening, understanding and developing trust and rapport can help to build the initial contract, and also assist in re-negotiating the contract if appropriate (e.g. "I notice we originally agreed we would do some exploration around [your CV], but you've also mentioned a few times while we've been talking about not being sure about a career in... perhaps it would be useful to explore this in a bit more detail today...?")

The following suggested questions and phrases are by no means a complete list...

Introduction

This is often about setting the scene and 'tone' for the meeting and how it might be different to other roles you may need to have with the trainee. The focus should be on:

- ✓ Confidentiality and supporting explanation of what this means
- ✓ Timing – agreeing an uninterrupted timescale for the session – and sticking to it
- ✓ Helping the trainee to move their thinking on in some way
- ✓ Explaining boundaries and expectations, e.g. you can't tell them what to do; you don't know everything about every speciality or have all the answers...
- ✓ Negotiating an agenda for the session

Helpful opening statements:

"Thanks for coming along today – we've have around (10/30/45 minutes) today..."

"What we discuss today is confidential unless we think it might be useful to share information or aspects of what we talk about with someone else/other people"

"It may be that we don't have all the information and answers today..."

"Where would you like to start?" (e.g. initial meeting) "How's things been since we last spoke?" (follow up meeting)

Clarifying – Setting the scene and ‘tone,’ developing the relationship, hearing the issues, making an initial assessment

Helpful **questions and phrases** associated with **clarifying**

- "What would you most like to focus on? What would you like to achieve as a result of the session?"
- "Can you help me to understand a bit more about...?"
- "So you've talked about... (x/y/z), which of those might be most important/useful to work on first...?"
- "We have 30 minutes set aside today, what would help you the most with...?"
- "Maybe we could work together in clarifying some of the most important factors for you..."
- "So from what you've said so far, you mentioned you'd really like to do some work around..."
- "What do you feel are the important issues to look at...?"



Exploring – Building a contract, developing empathy, exploring the issues, exploring options, re-examining the contract

Helpful **questions and phrases** associated with **exploring**

- "From the self assessment exercises/ work you have done so far into career options,... what key skills have you indentified about yourself?"
- "What do your assessment tools tell you about what you most enjoy and are good at?"
- "What gives you the biggest buzz at work? What energises you?"
- "What research have you done into ... so far? How does this fit with what you enjoy and are good at?"
- "Help me to understand what you mean by..."
- "Tell me a bit more about ..."
- "It might be useful to compare how you feel your key strengths compare with some of the assessment evidence from your portfolio..."
- "It sounds like something involving ... is going to be important to you..."
- "So far we've been looking at....I'm wondering if there are any further options you've considered...?"



Action planning – Identifying actions, supporting systematic action planning, referral sources if appropriate, reviewing the contract, ending and next steps

Helpful **questions and phrases** associated with **action planning**

- "So based on what we've worked on so far, what do you need to do first?"
- "How far do you think your thinking has progressed talking this through today...?"
- "What would help you to progress ...?"
- "It can be useful to jot down your actions if you'd find that helpful..."
- "How can I be of most support to you in working on...?"
- "When would you like to have progressed this by...?" (check SMART actions)
- "You've done a lot of thinking and challenging of yourself today..."
- "That's quite an important issue that would be useful to discuss further... as you know we have limited time today, so perhaps we could re-arrange to meet again at another time...?"
- "If it would be helpful to talk again let me know..."



Evaluating – Noticing inconsistencies, constructive challenge, pros and cons of options, options appraisal and prioritising, re-evaluation of the focus (contract)

Helpful **questions and phrases** associated with **evaluating**

- "What would be the benefits of.. What would be the downsides of ...?"
- "How does that option sound to you?"
- "What do you think/feel about...?"
- "Which areas do your assessment tools and feedback suggests you are less strong? Are these areas that are particularly important to suitability for further training in...?"
- "From what you've said so far it seems that...what I'm hearing is....is that right?"
- "I notice you are considering a very competitive specialty/area that requires particular competences in... how does this compare with your interests/ key skills and strengths in...?"
- "So far we've been working on...though I sense there may be something else that might still be concerning you?"
- "It sounds like you might be worried about.... Would it be helpful to look at that a bit more...?"

Further reading:

Ali, L and Graham, B, (1996) The Counselling Approach to Careers Guidance. London: Routledge.

- Kidd JM. (2006). Understanding Career Counselling: theory, research and practice. London. Sage
- Nathan, R and Hill L. (2008). Career Counselling. London: Sage
- Hirsh W, Jackson C and Kidd J (2001) Straight Talking: effective career discussions at work. National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC), Cambridge

