

Is AI threatening or enhancing the role of HE Career Practitioners?

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Existing research revealed a significant gap in contemporary qualitative studies concerning the impact of Gen AI on the role of career practitioners within the UK Higher Education (HE) system. Previous studies focused on the possibilities of using AI in career guidance (Westman et al., 2021), evaluating AI coaching against human coaches (Terblanche et al., 2022), quantitatively assessing the use of AI by career professionals (Collins, 2023), and a pilot study evaluating the use of customised Chat GPT hubs (Mirza, 2023).

Introduction

This qualitative study thus explored the impact of the use of Gen AI tools on the role of UK-based HE Career Practitioners through the following research questions:

1. When do career practitioners make the use of AI tools in their work?
2. What competencies/strengths are career practitioners using when students produce AI generated work?
3. What difficulties/concerns do career practitioners have when working with students using AI content?
4. How do career practitioners envisage their future roles to look like?

Methodology

- Primary research was conducted through semi-structured interviews between May and July 2024.
- 14 participants were recruited using non-random sampling strategies.
- Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase Thematic Analysis (TA) technique was used to analyse the exploratory nature of data collected.

Main Findings (14 participants)

Use of AI tools in their work?

12 used it to support with job applications
10 to structure workshop content
5 to create professional emails/posters

All cited their practical knowledge of GenAI, gained from CPD, as a strength
11 identified IAG and counselling skills as their key competency
8 highlighted personal qualities (accountability, openness to AI and knowledge sharing) as key to effective student sessions.

Competencies /Strengths used

Difficulties / concerns

10 noted the replacement of traditional skills with AI-prompt-writing skills
8 identified over-reliance and blind trust in AI technologies as a significant issue
7 highlighted challenges in keeping pace with AI advancements and evolving recruitment practices

10 emphasised the need to continuously develop their AI competencies (Agile mindset)
9 expressed concerns of being replaced by chatbots /avatars
9 stressed the importance of staying current with IAG skills, Labour Market Info and effective counselling

Future prospects

Conclusions

- AI not perceived as a replacement for the essential skills used in personalised student sessions
- Evident professional development in AI competencies supports future career proofing
- Strong consensus that human-centric skills, such as *guidance* and *counselling* will still be needed.
- AI acts more as an enhancing tool than a threat, provided career practitioners continue to embrace and effectively integrate evolving technology into their practice.

Applications

- Supplements existing subject knowledge
- Informs future academic studies, practitioner conferences and best practices in HE Career Services

References

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