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# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: WORKING AS AN ACADEMIC PRACTITIONER



**THERESA THOMSON AND KATE COLECHIN, CAREERS CONSULTANTS AT UWE, REFLECT ON WORKING IN AN ACADEMIC ROLE**

Theresa Thomson RCDP is a Career Consultant and Senior Lecturer in Career Development at UWE Bristol: [theresa2.thomson@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:theresa2.thomson@uwe.ac.uk) and Kate Colechin is a Pre-HE Career Consultant and Senior Lecturer in Career Development, UWE Bristol: [kate.colechin@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:kate.colechin@uwe.ac.uk)



Last year, Kate and I stepped across the divide from working as career practitioners to working as academic staff, collaborating in the design and development of a new online PG Certificate in Career Development at UWE Bristol. One year on, we have built on the success of this programme to offer an online MA/PG Diploma in Career Development with a QCD option for those in suitable employment.

We find ourselves now working in a fascinating space, bridging the divide by enhancing our practice with academic knowledge, and adding value to our academic role by drawing on our years of practitioner experience. We've morphed into a hybrid role – part practitioner, part (novice) academic. 'Pracademics' someone suggested recently, but surely that's a made-up word!

## Developing skills and academic confidence

As current and experienced practitioners, Kate and I are responsible for ensuring that our career development programmes equip learners with an authentic understanding of the skills and knowledge that are needed for the reality of career development work today.

Finding employment in a recovering economy and a stronger focus on careers work in education, we knew a programme was needed which met the demand for teaching skills, a more confident understanding of enterprise, both as a career option and as a mindset, and for confidence in using digital technology, both for delivery and resource design. The result? Postgraduate-level study that is contemporary, practice-led, yet builds academic confidence.

## Benefits to practice

As practitioners, we have benefitted too. Developing teaching materials for a career development programme has reminded us of how much practitioners know and need to know, if we are to have confidence in our professional identity.

Re-engaging with career theory and critically considering its relevance in this uncertain and changing world has given us renewed confidence in ourselves as practitioners. Reminding ourselves of the value and purpose of career development work has given us renewed pride in what we do. Taking the time to explore contemporary concepts of career has reminded us of the individual and complex nature of career. Reading recent research and policy means we feel informed and able to contribute to academic and practitioner discussions more confidently and more knowledgeably.

Designing an online course with academic colleagues and learning technologists in the Education Department means we understand how a programme of learning is structured and delivered using online platforms. This knowledge gives us the confidence to explore new ways of working with groups of learners, based on sound pedagogy, established principles of learning design and our own new found digital competence.

## Re-discovering the benefits of CDI membership

We are indebted to Claire Johnson, CDI Professional Development Manager for her advice and support as we developed our suite of programmes. However, one of the biggest revelations has been discovering the wealth of resources and CPD opportunities that the CDI provides. Not only does it feel that career development work is entering a 'golden age', but we are proud to be part of developing individuals to work in the sector, overseen by a professional association that is active and forward-thinking.

Applications for the MA/PG Diploma/PG Certificate in Career Development are open for September 2021 <https://courses.uwe.ac.uk/L55062/career-development>