

SIXTH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY (BUDAPEST, 5-7 DECEMBER 2011)

REFLECTION NOTE

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PREAMBLE

The symposium was attended by 127 representatives from 31 countries. Each country team prepared a country report in advance of the event, covering the four themes outlined below. Theme syntheses provided the basis for round-table discussions, the conclusions of which were fed back and synthesised at plenary sessions by the theme leader¹ and myself. This Reflection Note represents my reflections on the discussions, summarised in the syntheses I presented at the end of each plenary session. These syntheses formed the basis of the Communiqué approved by all participants following the event. Accordingly, while the Reflection Note is my personal responsibility, it extends and is designed to complement the Communiqué, which represents the collective conclusions of those present.

Theme 1: Political, economic and social changes and the changing role of career guidance policies and practice

1.1 A key role of career development systems and services is to help individuals to manage the interface between their career development and economic, political and social changes, to their own benefit and the benefit of the wider society.

1.2 While there was discussion at the symposium about the impact of political and social changes, much of the discussion was concerned with the impact of the current global economic crisis. It was however recognised that while this crisis was being experienced in many countries throughout the world, including most of those with relatively strong career development systems and services, other countries were experiencing economic growth – notably the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). In general, career development systems and services are much less well-developed in the BRICS; and in some, the individualism which underpins most career development practices is less dominant, being replaced to some extent by a more collectivist ethos. There are also issues in these countries

¹ The theme leaders were Gideon Arulmani (Theme 1), Lynne Bezanson (Theme 2), John McCarthy (Theme 3) and Raimo Vuorinen (Theme 4). I am grateful to all of them for their syntheses and for their support in drafting the Communiqué.

about 'growth without development', and about the quality of employment. An interesting issue is the extent to which career development systems and services might grow within these countries, perhaps on the basis of rather different models.

1.3 At times of economic crisis, the need and potential demand for career development systems and services is increased, but so are the pressures on public expenditure in response to this need. The result may be stronger rhetorical support for such services, but also practical pressures to constrain and where possible reduce funding for them. This tension may be resolved, for example, by merging services, or by effectively delegating responsibility for making the cuts (e.g. to schools). Much depends on the relative priority attached to these services by governments and by institutions/organisations delivering the services.

1.4 The case for funding career development systems and services is likely to be much stronger if it can be linked to wider policy priorities. When public expenditure is under pressure, particular significance is likely to be attached to agendas designed to support economic growth (e.g. skills strategies, workforce development) or reduce costs (e.g. reducing drop-outs from education, training and employment). Career development can also be linked to policy agendas related to demand-driven approaches to the planning of higher education and VET (vocational education and training). In all of these cases, supporting well-informed and well-thought-through individual career decisions can be viewed as an important part of strategies to avoid structural problems involving costs.

1.5 At the same time, it is important to argue the case for career development systems and services as a public good in their own right: as a citizen entitlement, linked to affirming human worth, dignity and hope. If this can be understood and accepted, it can help to make career development services less vulnerable to election cycles. It is also important to secure an appropriate balance between targeting intensive services to those who need them most (as required, for example, by agendas concerned with reducing drop-out) and providing core services to all (as required, for example, by agendas linked to demand-driven approaches to educational planning). Excessive focus on targeting can 'marginalise the mainstream'.

1.6 To perform their role in relation to public policy, career development systems and services must always aim at a dynamic balance between aspirations and realism, between personal goals and labour market demand. This requires significant attention to ensuring that access to high-quality labour market intelligence (LMI) is built into the career development process.

1.7 International collaboration in the field of career development and public policy has recently been significantly enhanced by the strong collaborative structures and processes within the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), supported by ongoing funding from the European Commission and the member countries. Through the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP) and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), it would seem desirable to strengthen links between the ELGPN and other symposium countries, to enable the structures and processes within ELGPN to be enriched by practices from countries outside Europe, for mutual benefit. Such links should include, but extend beyond, global sharing of ELGPN publications and tools – recognising that good practice is based on sharing learning, not importing models.

Theme 2: Lifelong guidance policy as a part of integrated human resource development policies – challenges and opportunities

2.1 Career development is integral to effective human resource development and skills strategies: i.e. to harnessing individual talents and motivations to the benefit of the economy and the wider society.

2.2 In most countries, career development policies are located within specific sectors (e.g. schools, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, employment, social policy). They are commonly stronger in some sectors than in others. But careers involve the construction of pathways across these sectors, on a lifelong basis. Career development is closely linked to lifelong learning, designed to ensure sustainable employability throughout life. Services designed to support citizens in this respect need to be as seamless as possible. It is accordingly important to develop lifelong strategies based on communication, co-operation and co-ordination across sectors.

2.3 A number of countries have now established career development policy forums or other policy co-operation/co-ordination mechanisms. These may include:

- The relevant ministries
- The social partners (employers and trade unions).
- Associations of career professionals.
- Other stakeholders.

2.4 Within Europe, the establishment of such mechanisms has been strongly encouraged and supported by ELGPN. One of the ELGPN Work Packages focuses on sharing models and experiences in establishing and sustaining mechanisms of these kinds. Models vary, as does the pace of development. Experience to date indicates that ensuring sustainability is never easy. There is a need for:

- Clarity about tasks and roles, and also about core values (moral purpose).
- A mix of top-down and bottom-up processes.
- Symmetry between partners, to keep them all on board.

Valuable progress has been made in a number of countries, on tasks like developing cross-sectoral glossaries and quality standards. An interesting issue is whether the existing structures and processes within ELGPN could be extended to enable other interested countries outside Europe to benefit from, and contribute to, this sharing process.

2.5 In exploring issues related to communication, co-operation and co-ordination, the issue of language is important, both within and across countries. Clear language is essential for clear communication, both within the career development field and to external audiences – including policy-makers. The language used to describe career development in relation to public policy is varied and often confusing. Some branding based on core concepts is needed, to support consistency, coherence and continuity.

2.6 ‘Career development’ is increasingly the over-arching term used in the English-speaking world (e.g. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK, USA). It can be defined as ‘lifelong guidance for learning and work’: this is helpful, because ‘lifelong guidance’ is the term currently used within the European

Community, linked to 'lifelong learning'. 'Learning' covers education, training, and informal learning; 'work' covers employment, self-employment, and work in the informal economies (including household work, voluntary work, and cash-based work in the 'grey' economy). Similarly, 'guidance' is commonly used to cover a range of interventions, including career information, careers education, career counselling and others.

2.7 It is important, however, to note two caveats in relation to the term 'lifelong guidance':

- 'Guidance' could be viewed as being somewhat directive in nature, whereas career development is designed to promote people's capacity to manage their own careers, with access to help where needed.
- 'Lifelong guidance' could be viewed as suggesting that the state should pay for securing access to guidance on a lifelong basis. But while assuring access to such help throughout life is a public as well as a private good, this does not mean that the state should necessarily be expected to pay for it all: some will be funded by the state, directly or indirectly; some in other ways. The roles of the state can be to stimulate the market, to quality-assure the market, and to compensate for market failure.

2.8 If there can be agreement for the present on these core terms, they could then be reviewed at the next International Symposium in 2013, in the light of, for example, the current ELGPN work on developing a policy-related glossary on lifelong guidance (the consultation processes for which might be extended to give the glossary global relevance). It might also be helpful to develop a taxonomy, to cover the language used not only by careers practitioners and policy-makers but also by the general public. The selection of terminology always needs to be adapted to different contexts and different audiences.

2.9 All of this work needs also to be adapted to other languages than English, recognising that this process will be concerned not simply with translation, but also with addressing the different conceptual frameworks that different languages represent.

Theme 3: The changing world and the changing role of career guidance – skills and competencies for lifelong guidance practitioners

3.1 From a policy perspective, ensuring that the skills and competencies of career development practitioners are fit for purpose is a crucial aspect of assuring the quality of services. High-quality services require a strong careers profession. Professionalisation can be viewed by policy-makers and service managers both positively (as supporting quality assurance) and negatively (as adding to the costs of services). But the support of policy-makers and service managers is critical if higher professional standards are to be achieved.

3.2 Professional structures in the career development field need to cover a variety of different roles in a variety of different sectors. Currently, the level of professionalisation varies considerably both between and within countries. For some roles within some countries, specified directly-relevant qualifications are required in order to practise; for others, they are not.

3.3 There have recently been moves in a number of countries to develop stronger professional standards, linked to stronger quality-assurance frameworks, and to do so on a cross-sectoral basis. This

work is often managed by professional associations or sector bodies, sometimes with financial support from government. It may be linked to the development of a professional register and a licence to practise.

3.4 Such work needs to be closely linked to the development of national qualifications frameworks, where these exist. The development of such frameworks is designed to encourage mobility and flexibility within the labour market, linked to the recognition of prior learning. One of the roles of career development systems and services is to lubricate the effective use of these frameworks, by supporting individuals in navigating their pathways within them. It is all the more important, therefore, that such services apply the same principles to their own professional structures. This should include:

- Core competencies, supplemented by specialist competencies.
- Identification of competencies shared with cognate professions (e.g. teaching, counselling, human resource development).
- Recognition of prior learning.
- Progression pathways into, within and beyond the careers profession.

3.5 Closer links are needed between policy-makers, professional associations, employers and training deliverers (in higher education, other training centres and the workplace), to ensure that professional standards and training provision (including both initial training and continuing professional development) are informed by developments in policy and practice, and lead innovation rather than lagging behind it. Two important examples are using LMI (see 1.6 above) and harnessing technology (including e-guidance and broader re-engineering of service-delivery models)².

3.6 Attention is needed to the quality assurance of training deliverers, with potential roles here for policy-makers, professional associations, and sector bodies. Stronger networks are needed for sharing of international practice in relation to professional standards and training provision (in terms of both curriculum content and methodologies). There is also a case for developing self-evaluation criteria for professional associations in the career development field, to enable them to review their fitness for purpose, their effectiveness, and directions for development.

Theme 4: Evidence-based practice; evidence-based policies

4.1 The career development field has not always embraced the need for evidence on effectiveness and impact. But if public expenditure on career development systems and services is to be justified, it needs to be supported by such evidence. This needs to include accountability frameworks for routine data collection, plus longitudinal research studies to determine longer-term impact. A strong research and evidence base is also an essential underpinning for good practice in career development delivery.³

4.2 Accountability frameworks might include any or all of the following:

- Potential user needs (market research).

² The progress report of the Working Group on Transformational Technology established at the 2009 symposium was presented at the Budapest symposium.

³ The progress report of the Working Group on 'Prove It Works' established at the 2009 symposium was presented at the Budapest symposium.

- Processes (how career development practitioners use their time, including extent and nature of interactions with users).
- User reactions (satisfaction with services/programmes received).
- Immediate learning outcomes (development of career management skills; impact on motivation, confidence etc.).
- Short-term behavioural outcomes (entry into courses or jobs).
- Longer-term outcomes (success/drop-out, career pathways).

These can be complemented by other quality criteria (e.g. practitioner competence, citizen/user involvement, service provision and improvement strategies, cost-benefits to society and individuals). The longer-term outcomes tend to be most closely linked to the social and economic outcomes valued by policy-makers. They also tend however to be more expensive to collect, and subject to data-protection issues and 'wash-out' effects (impact of other factors). Also, politicians are often interested in short-term data that will demonstrate impact within the electoral cycle.

4.3 Some of these data may be collected routinely, as part of managerial processes. Others may be carried out on a sample basis, perhaps undertaken by external research bodies. These latter can be linked to a broader research strategy to provide a strong underpinning for evidence-based policy and practice.

4.4 Such data can be used for a variety of different purposes. These include:

- By practitioners, for reflective evidence-based practice.
- By managers, for accountability purposes.
- By policy-makers, to justify funding.
- By other stakeholders (e.g. users, parents, employers), to review the effectiveness of services within a broader framework of community accountability.

The purposes for which data are to be used are likely to influence the reliability and validity of the data collected. In addition, attention is needed to the cost-benefits of data collection: the time consumed in collecting data is time taken away from interactions with users. Politicians sometimes give mixed messages in this respect: they want accountability, but criticise the 'bureaucracy' this requires.

4.5 There is arguably a need to engage more strongly with economists, who tend to have a stronger influence on policy-makers than the psychologists and sociologists who have provided the main theoretical underpinnings for the career development field. Such engagement could broaden the interdisciplinary base of the field.

4.6 It is important to recognise that accountability data and research findings are necessary but not sufficient to influence policy-makers. They need to be supplemented by 'stories': by case examples which bring the data to life and speak to the heart as well as the mind (policy-making is an affective as well as cognitive process).

4.7 International benchmarking can also be influential. Optional questions on career development systems and services are included in the next round of OECD's PISA survey. There is a strong case for encouraging OECD and partner organisations to repeat the influential country reviews conducted in 2001-03, taking advantage of this and other data sources now available.

4.8 In addition, there is a need for a handbook for policy-makers on ‘what we know and what we can find out’, to pull together the key existing evidence on the impact of career development systems and services, and provide a guide to the possible elements of accountability frameworks (with examples). It would be helpful if producing such a handbook could be included in the next ELGPN work programme (2013-14), especially if this work could be carried out in collaboration with relevant research networks in other countries outside Europe.