Career Guidance Policies in 36 Countries: Contrasts and Common Themes

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Executive summary

Three co-ordinated reviews of national career guidance policies have recently been carried out by OECD, the European Commission and the World Bank, covering 36 countries in total. Some important differences are evident, with services in middle-income countries being less well-developed than in high-income countries. But the dynamics of globalisation, together with 'policy borrowing', have led to a great deal of convergence.

In all countries, career guidance is viewed as a public good, linked to policy goals related to learning, the labour market and social equity. These goals are being reframed in the light of lifelong learning policies, linked to active labour market policies and the concept of sustained employability. Career guidance accordingly needs to be accessible not just to school-leavers and the unemployed, but to everyone throughout their lives.

To meet this challenge but avoid substantial increases in costs, efforts are needed to diversify the methods and sources of provision. These include innovative and more streamlined interventions, helping individuals to develop career-management skills and supporting self-help approaches. To enhance access, increasing use is being made of helplines and web-based services. In addition, stronger involvement is being sought from the private and voluntary sectors alongside the public sector.

With career guidance taking increasingly varied and disparate forms, there is a need within countries for stronger mechanisms to articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering lifelong access to career guidance. Such mechanisms are required both within government and involving other stakeholders. Their role could include the development of quality standards and other strategic instruments to co-ordinate the range of career guidance provision.

Introduction

Internationally, career guidance is higher on the public policy agenda than ever before. This paper summarises the key findings from three overlapping reviews of career guidance policies, which together have covered 36 countries. The first was a review of 14 countries conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003).[1] At the request of the European Commission, the questionnaire developed for the OECD review was then completed by all member-states and acceding countries that had not taken part in the review, and a synthesis report was produced covering 28 European countries in total (Sultana, 2003).[2] Finally, an adapted version of the same questionnaire was also used for a World Bank review of career guidance policies in 7 middle-income countries (Watts & Fretwell, 2003).[3] A significant stimulus for the co-ordination of the three reviews was provided by two international symposia on career development and public policy, held in Canada in 1999 and 2001 (Hiebert & Bezanson, 2000; Bezanson & O'Reilly, 2002).

The definitions of career guidance adopted for the three reviews are virtually identical. The term refers to services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. These may include services in schools, in universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in companies, in the voluntary/ community sector and in the private sector. The services may be on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including helplines and web-based services). They include career information (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education and career management programmes, taster programmes, work search programmes, and transition services.

The present paper aims to identify the key common issues which have emerged from the three reviews, and the conclusions which can be drawn from them. First, though, some contrasts across the countries will be examined. Finally, a few closing reflections will be added to frame the discussions at this conference.

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[1] The 14 countries were: Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The review also included the joint commissioning by OECD and the European Commission of expert papers on key topics.

[2] The 28 countries were: Austria*, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic*, Denmark*, Estonia, Finland*, France, Germany*, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland*, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg*, Malta, Netherlands*, Norway*, Poland+, Portugal, Romania+, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain*, Sweden, and the United Kingdom* (Belgium is to be added later). * indicates countries which also took part in the OECD review; + indicates countries which also took part in the World Bank review. The other countries completed questionnaires but did not have review visits by external experts.

[3] The 7 countries were: Chile, Poland, Romania, the Philippines, Russia, South Africa, and Turkey.

Some contrasts

There are difficulties and dangers in carrying out and synthesising a comparative analysis on this scale. The main danger is downplaying the extent to which each country has its own traditions and history of provision, with the same terms and concepts sometimes concealing quite different shades of meaning. The dynamics of globalisation have led to a great deal of inter-country convergence in the practice of career guidance: all countries face a similar set of broad challenges for education, labour market and social policies related to career guidance systems. Nevertheless, it needs to be constantly kept in mind that all guidance services reflect the economic, political, social, cultural, educational and labour market contexts – as well as the professional and organisational structures – in which they operate.

Some of these contrasts emerge less strongly in these reviews than one might have anticipated. Thus the OECD report on Korea, one of the few non-Western countries covered, notes the influence of Korean values (stemming largely from Confucian tradition) of respect for elders, deference, and obedience to authority; and also of endurance (learning to bear one's problems), maintaining social 'face' and avoiding embarrassment; these mores are not reflected explicitly, however, in the subsequent analysis of services. Similarly, the EC and World Bank reports note the importance in middle-income countries of the informal economy, much of it unregulated, in which individuals gain a living in semi-legitimate, entrepreneurial ways; but the reports find few guidance practices that attend to this economy and its importance in the work-lives of many individuals.

In part the lack of such contrasts may be a commentary on guidance systems themselves, which are inclined to be formal in nature and to be heavily influenced by European and North American models. The downplaying of differences may also be exacerbated by the OECD questionnaire used for all of the reviews, which tended – for understandable reasons – to emphasise formal structures at the expense of informal ones, and systems and structures at the expense of contents and processes.

Despite this, there are some **specific differences** between countries which emerge clearly from the reviews. These include, for example, differences between educational systems with strong early-streaming and tracking mechanisms and those with more flexible pathways: guidance services tend to play a more important role in the latter than in the former. They also include differences between countries in which most public services – including career guidance services – are delivered by the state or state agencies, and countries in which there has been a strong policy to deliver services through the private and voluntary sectors wherever possible: the latter tends to lead to greater diversity of service provision.

Two contrasts seem particularly worthy of note. One is the importance of level of **economic development**. While no low-income countries were included in the reviews, it would seem unlikely that formal career guidance services would have a significant role to play in such economies (though informal community-based services might). It is only as

economic activity becomes more formalised and diversified, and resources are available to attend to the problems this poses, that formal guidance services start to grow. The World Bank review shows that middle-income countries tend in general to have less well-developed career guidance systems than high-income countries, and in particular more limited career information to support such systems. This may be partly because of low levels of public resources, partly because the range of choices for many individuals is more restricted, and partly because more people are preoccupied with economic survival rather than with development and growth.

The second is the relationship of career guidance services to the development of **market economies and democratic political institutions**. This is particularly relevant to the countries of central and eastern Europe which have been moving from command to market economies; and to South Africa which has been in transition from the apartheid regime to a more integrated and open society. In centrally planned economies under the Communist regime, for example, there was little perceived need for career guidance services: unemployment did not officially exist, and people were largely allocated to their roles by selective processes; 'career' was linked with individualism, and regarded as a social vice. Career guidance services distinctively affirm the value attached in market-based democratic societies to the rights of individuals to make free decisions about their own working lives, linking personal goals to the socio-economic needs of the society in which they live.

Particularly in middle-income and transition countries, but also elsewhere, there is much evidence of **'policy borrowing'**, in terms of strategies, tools, resources and training. In some respects, the United States is the 'absent centre' from the reviews, since it is not directly included and yet its influence on career guidance practice is evident in most if not all of the participating countries. In recent years, Canada has been particularly successful in exporting its practices, 'The Real Game' – a career development programme involving role-play and simulation – being a prominent but not unique example. There are also examples of other links, often influenced by historic, linguistic, economic or cultural ties. Thus German models have been influential in several central and east European countries; French models tend to be visible in Francophone countries. In some countries, collaborative and support programmes financed by the European Commission and World Bank have had considerable impact. To some extent such programmes tend to promote a process of convergence, but they seem to be most successful when they include a process through which they are customised to the distinctive needs of countries and respond to country conditions.

Key common issues

With these caveats, we will now identify the key common issues which emerged from the three reviews. We will do so under five broad headings: rationale; evidence; delivery; resourcing; and leadership.

Rationale

The reviews indicate that in all countries policy-makers clearly regard career guidance as a public good as well as a private good. The **public-policy goals** which they expect career guidance services to address fall into three main categories. The first are *learning* goals, including improving the efficiency of the education and training system and managing its interface with the labour market. The second are *labour market* goals, including improving the match between supply and demand and managing adjustments to change. The third are *social equity* goals, including supporting equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion. The balance between and within these categories varies across countries. A challenge for all countries is to maintain an appropriate balance between them in the provision of services.

These goals are currently being reframed in the light of policies relating to lifelong learning, linked to active labour market policies and the concept of sustained employability. The result is that countries increasingly recognise the need to expand access to career guidance so that it is available not just to selected groups like school-leavers and the unemployed, but to everyone throughout their lives.

This is arguably the key point in the reports, with huge implications. It requires not just expansion but **transformation**. If the expanded access that is required were to be achieved solely through public services and such traditional methods as face-to-face interviews linked to psychometric testing, there would inevitably be a massive increase in costs. For these and other reasons, efforts are being made to diversify the methods and sources of provision and to seek innovative and more streamlined forms of service delivery. As part of this, there is a move towards self-help approaches, including approaches designed to help individuals to develop the skills of managing their own careers. These trends are supported by recent trends in career development theory, which emphasise that career guidance should be available throughout life, should be viewed as a learning experience, and should foster the individual's autonomy.

Recent OECD work on **human capital** (OECD, 2002) suggests that the career management skills which are now a growing focus of career guidance policies and practices may play an important role in economic growth. It points out that less than half of earnings variation in OECD countries can be accounted for by educational qualifications and readily measurable skills. It argues that a significant part of the remainder may be explained by people's ability to build, and to manage, their skills. Included in this are career-planning, job-search and other career-management skills. There is a close harmony between this wider view of human capital and concepts of employability. Seen in this perspective, it seems that career guidance has the potential to contribute significantly to national policies for the development of human capital.

Evidence

In this context, the available empirical evidence on outcomes from career guidance is of great interest to policy-makers. Of course, policy-making is not a wholly rational process: power processes matter too, and anecdotal evidence can often be persuasive. It is important to acknowledge that many social activities are supported by public funds without such evidence: the teaching of history or literature, for example. But sound empirical evidence is helpful if sceptics are to be convinced.

The OECD report reviews the existing evidence at three stages: immediate learning outcomes from career guidance, including attitudinal changes and increased knowledge; intermediate behavioural changes, including entry into a particular career path, course or job; and longer-term outcomes, such as success and satisfaction with these paths or placements.

In these terms, there is substantial evidence of the **learning outcomes** which individuals derive from career guidance interventions. This is important, because in general career guidance interventions are concerned not with telling people what to do but with helping them acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help them make better career choices and transitions. It is also congruent with the growing attention to the development of career management skills.

In the aggregate, there is also growing evidence of positive **behavioural outcomes** in terms of impact upon participation in learning and in work: more such studies are needed. On **long-term benefits** in terms of success or satisfaction – to which some policy outcomes in terms of economic and social benefits are linked – adequate studies have not yet been conducted. There is a case for a major international initiative, possibly linked to continuing OECD work on human capital, to determine what is feasible in this respect: the methodological difficulties and cost implications of long-term longitudinal studies are formidable. Meanwhile, it can be concluded that the available evidence on the benefits of career guidance is not comprehensive, but that what exists is largely positive.

Delivery

The reports go on to examine the current delivery of career guidance services in relation to the changing rationale outlined above. Much of the value of these analyses lies in their detail and in the examples of practice they include. Twelve general points relating to delivery are particularly worth noting here.

The first is the growing recognition of the importance of **career education and guidance in schools**, not only in helping young people to make the immediate choices that confront them but also in laying the foundations for lifelong learning and lifelong career development. This is evident, for example, in the inclusion in many countries of career education in the curriculum, incorporating career awareness, career exploration, and the

development of career management skills. This can be a separate subject, or subsumed into a broader subject, or infused across the curriculum (though the latter approach is difficult to implement successfully); alternatively, it may be provided in the form of seminars and workshops. Such programmes are greatly enriched where they include active involvement of employers, parents and other stakeholders, and opportunities for pupils to engage in experiential learning: course tasters; and active experiences of the world of work through visits, simulation, shadowing or actual work experience. The longer-term perspective is also evident in the introduction of profiling and portfolio systems designed to encourage students to engage in regular review and planning and to manage their own learning. As with career education, such approaches can start in primary school. They have implications for the whole school, evident for example in the concept of *l'école orientante* in Quebec.

Second, there is a risk of career education and guidance in schools being **marginalised within a broad concept of guidance**. Many countries have guidance counsellors with a holistic role covering personal and social as well as educational and vocational guidance. In such schools, there is consistent evidence that career guidance tends to be marginalised, in two respects: the pressing nature of the personal and behavioural problems of a minority of pupils mean that guidance counsellors spend much of their time on these problems, at the expense of the help needed by all pupils in relation to their educational and vocational choices; and guidance on such choices tends to focuses mainly on educational decisions viewed as ends in themselves, rather than on their vocational implications and on longer-term career planning. In Norway, accordingly, the career guidance role is being split off, partly to protect its resourcing, and partly to address its distinctive competence requirements, including knowledge of the labour market. In Poland, too, separate career counsellors are now being introduced into schools.

Third, it is clear that alongside career education and guidance within the school itself, there is merit in making career guidance available in a specialist form from the employment service or some other **agency based outside the school** – as is the case, for example, in Germany and the UK. Such an agency can offer closer links with the labour market, and stronger assurance of impartiality in the guidance they provide. In several countries there has been some erosion of such agencies in recent years, with damaging consequences. On the other hand, other countries are exploring the possibility of setting up new agencies of this kind. In such cases there is a need for clear partnership models with schools, to avoid confusion and unnecessary overlap.

Fourth, there has in many countries been a growing policy concern for **at-risk young people** who have dropped out of formal education and training with few or no qualifications, and who are drifting in and out of unemployment, labour-market inactivity and marginal unskilled work. In Denmark, for example, municipalities are obliged to make contact with, and offer guidance to, such young people. Successful strategies for this work involve a highly individualised approach which attends to their personal and social as well as their educational and vocational guidance needs: in contrast with our earlier comments on schools, this is a case where holistic approaches are highly desirable. Such strategies can be managed through close partnership working between career

guidance workers and youth workers, using outreach approaches. An alternative model is to have a single generic 'first-in-line' role, supported by a range of specialists (including career guidance specialists) who can be brought in when their distinctive help is needed.

Fifth, it is evident that in several countries career guidance services in **tertiary education** are inadequate or non-existent. Ironically, guidance roles within education tend to be least strongly professionalised in higher education, which is the sector responsible for much of the professional training in the field as a whole. In some countries such guidance as is available is confined largely to choice of studies: the assumption seems to be that students can manage their own transitions into the labour market without any support. This may have been sustainable when their student body covered a small academic elite, who normally entered a narrow field of work related to their studies. It is much more questionable when the number of students is much larger and more diverse, and when the links between their studies and the fields open to them are much more complex. There is accordingly increasing recognition of the need to strengthen career guidance services in tertiary education. These include not only central careers services, but also developments in the curriculum including career management courses, opportunities for work experience, and profiling and portfolio systems, extending and enhancing earlier such provision in schools.

Sixth, there is a widespread need to integrate **public employment services** more closely into lifelong learning strategies in general and strategies for lifelong access to guidance in particular. Huge public resources are concentrated in these services. They tend at present to be targeted narrowly at particular groups (notably the unemployed) and short-term goals (immediate employment and removal from the benefit system). But they could be transformed into well-publicised career development services for all, helping people to sustain their employability and respond flexibly to change. This could also enable their work with the targeted groups to be preventive rather than purely remedial and to avoid the stigma which can undermine the effectiveness of such work. A strong model could, for example, be developed by bringing together the respective strengths of the career information centres (BIZ) in Germany with the innovative capacity of the public employment service (Aetat) in Norway, including the design quality of the latter's walk-in services, the user-friendliness of its website, its inventive range of web-based tools, and its plans to set up a callcentre for information on learning and work.

Seventh, there is a need for enhanced career guidance services to be provided in the **workplace** by employers for their employees. These can include career planning workshops and regular review and planning processes, paralleling those within education. They tend to be stronger in large organizations than in small and medium-sized enterprises. While employer interests may impose constraints on the impartiality of such services, they are an important part of lifelong guidance provision. They can be supported by public policy through voluntary quality-mark schemes, and by including career guidance provision within expenditure allowable against training levies. There is also interest in a number of countries, including Austria, the Netherlands and the UK, in the role of trade unions in providing career guidance services for their members.

Eighth, career guidance can have a particularly dynamic role to play in **adult education**. Some access provision for people returning to learning or to work includes strong guidance elements. Again, procedures for the accreditation and recognition of prior learning can develop into a guidance dialogue, in which individuals are helped not only to identify the knowledge and competencies they have acquired informally, but also to explore new opportunities to which they might be transferable. Career guidance services can also be used to improve the responsiveness of educational institutions to consumer needs through advocacy on their behalf and through feedback to providers on their unmet needs. In an experiment in Sweden, learners were not permitted to start an education or training programme without first seeing a guidance counsellor and drawing up a learning plan.

Ninth, a life-stage where current provision is particularly inadequate is the **third age**. Many countries are expressing growing concerns about their ageing populations and difficulties in funding adequate pension provision, and the consequent need to encourage people to stay longer in the labour force. There is also growing interest in encouraging those who have left the labour market to continue their involvement in learning and in voluntary work in the community, so reducing health bills and harnessing their social contribution. But no country has yet systematically addressed the potential role of guidance services in these various respects, and more generally in helping individuals to manage more gradual and more flexible approaches to 'retirement'.

Tenth, there is much scope for using **helplines and web-based services** to extend access to guidance, and for integrating such services more creatively with face-to-face services. In the UK, the Learndirect helpline was launched in February 1998; since then it has responded to over 5 million calls. In principle, flexible but integrated use of helplines, websites and email, linked closely with face-to-face facilities, opens up new strategic opportunities for the delivery of career information and guidance. It means that individuals can initially access help in the form which is convenient and comfortable for them, and then where appropriate be moved on to other media to maintain the dialogue.

Eleventh, good-quality **career information** is essential for good-quality career guidance and good-quality career decision-making. Governments have an important role to play in funding the collection, publication and distribution of career information. Even where information is produced by others, they should also seek to assure its quality. Too often career information is driven by producer needs rather than consumer needs. There is a need for strong 'cross-pathing' between educational and occupational information – showing, for example, the occupational implications of educational decisions, and the educational pathways that lead to particular occupational destinations. This requires close collaboration between education and labour authorities. ICT-based systems make integration of this kind easier to deliver, and also make it possible to add a diagnostic front-end to enable individuals to input their characteristics and preferences and be guided to appropriate opportunities. The National Career Information System in Australia is a good example of what can be produced.

Finally, there is scope to redesign the physical facilities of all career guidance services on a **self-help** basis. Some services, particularly in some middle-income countries, are designed solely for one-to-one consultations, with information resources kept in counsellors' offices rather than on open display. Elsewhere, though, it is increasingly common for a variety of ICT-based and other resources to be on open access, with clear signposting, and with specialist career counsellors being available for brief support as well as for longer counselling interviews. Diagnostic help can then be provided on reception to help clients decide whether they can operate on a self-help basis, need brief staff assistance, or require intensive professional help.

Resourcing

Under the heading of resourcing, there are two key issues which have implications for the nature and quality of career guidance services. The first is how such services are staffed. The second is how they are funded.

On staffing, there is a need for **stronger occupational structures** in the career guidance field. In many countries, the current structures are weak in comparison with those in related professions. Many services are provided by people who do it for only part of their time (the rest being devoted to teaching, job placement, or guidance on personal or study problems) and little appropriate training. Often, qualifications from apparently related fields – such as teaching and psychology – seem to be regarded as proxies for guidance qualifications, without any verification of whether they assure the requisite competencies or not. Guidance strategies can include delivery through others – teachers and mentors of various kinds, for example; there is also a need for wider use of trained support staff. But clarity is needed about the role of guidance professionals within such diversified delivery systems. Their training should include consultancy and management roles, and embrace the types of cost-effective and flexible delivery methods that can widen access to guidance.

Supporting such diversified training provision, there is also a need for **competence frameworks** which can embrace but also differentiate a variety of guidance roles – and provide a career development structure for guidance staff themselves. The Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners, developed in Canada through a long process of consultation between all the professional groups involved, is of particular interest in this respect. The international standards recently developed by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance provide a useful reference point for such processes.

On funding, policy options include **devolving funding** either to regions and localities as part of decentralization, or to individual educational institutions. This can result in stronger local ownership and customisation of services, but can also produce wide variation in their level and quality. Steps that can be taken by central governments to avoid this include staffing formulas, performance contracts and legislative-based entitlements.

Some governments have **contracted out** a range of employment services, including career guidance services. This can result in cheaper services and, particularly in the case of the voluntary, community-based sector, in services that are more closely attuned to the needs of particular groups. It can also, however, result in services that are fragmented. In Canada, it is estimated that there are over 10,000 community-based organisations delivering career development services. Alternatively, a few countries have trialled **voucher** schemes in which funding is channelled through the clients, who can use their voucher to 'buy' the service from a provider of their choice.

Contracts and vouchers can also be linked to pump-priming **private markets** for career guidance service delivery. There are strong markets in a number of countries in career publishing, in placement agencies, and in outplacement services. But in general markets for career guidance *per se* are supported largely by contracted-out public employment services and by employers. Only in a few countries, notably Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, is there much evidence of a market in career guidance supported by fees paid by individuals themselves, and even here this market is still limited. It is as yet unclear whether this is a transitional problem, linked to users being accustomed to such services being free of charge, or a systemic problem, based on difficulties in treating career guidance as a commodity in the ways a market would require.

In all countries, more information is needed on the extent and potential of these markets. Since guidance is widely viewed as a public as well as a private good, the roles of government in relation to a mixed-economy model of provision would seem to be threefold: to stimulate the market (through contracts and incentives) in order to build its capacity; to ensure that it is quality-assured, both to protect the public interest and to build consumer confidence; and to compensate for market failure by addressing needs which the market cannot meet, where this is viewed as being in the public interest.

Leadership

Governments have an important role in providing strategic leadership. But they need to do so in association with other stakeholders: education and training providers, employers, trade unions, community agencies, students, parents, other consumers, and career guidance practitioners.

Evidence and data are important tools for policy-making. Stronger infrastructures are required to build up the **evidence base** for both policy and practice, and to do this cumulatively so that experience is not wasted and mistakes repeated. This should include evidence on users, on client needs, on which services are delivered to whom, on the costs of services (on which remarkably little information is available at present), and on the immediate and longer-term outcomes of guidance interventions. The limited extent of such data at present is due to the absence of an accountability culture among professional guidance staff and to the lack of pressure from policy-makers to collect the data. Some of

the information should be collected on a routine basis; some requires sophisticated studies. To date, few countries have established specialist career guidance research centres or research programmes to develop the knowledge base in a systemic way. There is also a need for university chairs to provide status and intellectual leadership for the field: few countries have such chairs at present.

Legislation can be another instrument for steering career guidance services. It plays an important role in this respect in some countries, but none at all in others. Where legislation exists, it tends to be general in nature. Much of it is sector-specific: Denmark is a rare example of a country which has a specific career guidance Act covering all sectors. The value of legislation as a policy steering tool would be increased if it was used to define client entitlements.

A need is evident in many countries for stronger **co-ordination and leadership mechanisms** in order to articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering lifelong access to guidance. Such mechanisms are required within government, where responsibility for guidance services is often fragmented across a number of ministries and branches. Strong co-operation between education and employment portfolios is particularly important: for example, to ensure that educational and occupational information are integrated; and that a strong labour market perspective is included in schools' career guidance programmes.

Co-ordinating mechanisms are also needed more broadly at national level, to bring together the relevant stakeholder groups and the various guidance professional bodies (which in some countries are very fragmented). Parallel mechanisms are then required at regional and/or local levels, closer to the point of delivery.

The UK has a strong model in these various respects, with its National IAG Board to bring the relevant government departments together, its Guidance Council to bring the stakeholders together, its Federation of Professional Associations in Guidance to bring the professional groups together, and its Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) partnerships of local adult guidance providers. Another promising exemplar is the National Forum for Vocational Guidance in Poland. In some other countries, by contrast, seminars set up for the OECD and World Bank reviews seemed to provide an unusual opportunity for the relevant groups to come together, and led to proposals to develop a more sustainable infrastructure for joint action.

An important focus for such collaborative action is identifying gaps in services and developing action plans for filling them. Another is the development of **strategic instruments** which can be operationally useful across the whole range of the career guidance field and hold it together. Competence frameworks for career guidance practitioners of the kind developed in Canada are one. Another is organisational quality standards of the kind developed in the UK, covering how individuals are helped and how services are managed: these can be voluntary in nature, but can also be made mandatory for organisations in receipt of public funding. A third type of instrument, developed in Canada drawing from earlier work in the USA, is the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs: a

list of the competencies which career education and guidance programmes aim to develop among clients at different stages of their lives, with accompanying performance indicators. The systematic publication of data linked to such indicators could provide a way of introducing more coherent accountability across a co-ordinated career guidance system. Together, these three instruments could co-ordinate the system, particularly if they could be linked to common branding and marketing of services.

Conclusions

The conclusions in the three synthesis reports are framed in rather different ways. In the European report, they are framed in terms of trends in the nature of guidance, and to whom, when, where, by whom and how it is offered. In the World Bank report, they comprise four general conclusions, one of which identifies five priorities for middle-income countries. The OECD report defines ten features of lifelong guidance systems and six issues for policy-makers to address. Since the features and issues identified by OECD embrace most of the European trends and the World Bank conclusions, they can – with a few small additions and modifications – serve as conclusions for the three studies.

The **ten features of lifelong guidance systems** can be framed as criteria which policy-makers can use to examine the adequacy of their current guidance systems in lifelong terms, and to determine priorities for action. The ten features are:

- Transparency and ease of access over the lifespan, including a capacity to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients.
- Attention to key transition points over the lifespan.
- Flexibility and innovation in service delivery to reflect the differing needs and circumstances of diverse client groups.
- Processes to stimulate individuals to engage in regular review and planning.
- Access to individual guidance by appropriately qualified practitioners for those who need such help, at times when they need it.
- Programmes for all young people to develop their career-management skills.
- Opportunities to investigate and experience learning and work options before choosing them.
- Access to service delivery that is independent of the interests of particular institutions or enterprises.
- Access to comprehensive and integrated educational, occupational and labour market information.
- Active involvement of relevant stakeholders.

The (now) **seven issues** which the creation and management of such lifelong guidance systems require policy-makers to address are:

- Ensuring that resource allocation decisions give the first priority to systems that develop career self-management skills and career information, and that delivery systems match levels of personal help, from brief to extensive, to personal needs and circumstances, rather than assuming that everybody needs intensive personal career guidance.

- Ensuring greater diversity in the types of services that are available and in the ways that they are delivered, including greater diversity in staffing structures, wider use of self-help techniques, and a more integrated approach to the use of ICT (including helplines as well as the Internet).

- Exploring the scope for facilitating measures, including appropriate incentives, designed to encourage the development of career guidance services within the private and voluntary sectors.

- Working more closely with professional associations and training bodies to improve education and training for career guidance practitioners, preferably on a cross-sectoral basis, producing professionals who can manage guidance resources as well as be engaged in direct service delivery.

- Improving the information base for public policy making, including gathering improved data on the financial and human resources devoted to career guidance, on client need and demand, on the characteristics of clients, on client satisfaction, and on the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of career guidance.

- Developing better quality assurance mechanisms and linking these to the funding of services.

- Developing stronger structures for strategic leadership.

Postscript

Finally, there are three general points which may be helpful if relation to subsequent discussions at this conference. In part these emerged from the two international symposia mentioned earlier, but merit repeating here.

The first point is the importance of viewing career guidance services within each country as a coherent **system**. In reality, of course, they are not a single system. Rather, they are a collection of disparate sub-systems, including services in schools, in tertiary education, in public employment services, and in the private and voluntary sectors. Each of these is a minor part of some wider system, with its own rationale and driving forces. But in the reviews these different parts have been brought together, and viewed as parts of a whole.

From the lifelong perspective of the individual, it is important that they should be as seamless as possible. If career guidance systems are to play their role in national strategies for lifelong learning linked to sustained employability, it is essential that the holistic vision adopted in the reviews be sustained and collectively owned by a council or other structure with the breadth and strength of membership to implement the vision. This is why stronger strategic leadership structures are so necessary.

Second, within lifelong learning strategies there is a strong case for viewing career guidance in more **proactive** terms than has been the case hitherto. Until recently, such services have been viewed largely as a reactive device, designed to help young people to manage the necessary transition from education to the labour market, and unemployed people to return to work as quickly as possible. This means that services need to be made available only when they have a problem which services can help them to solve. Within the context of lifelong learning, however, it can be argued that such services need to be available at times and in forms which will encourage all individuals to continue to develop their skills and competencies throughout their lives, linked to changing needs in the labour market. Such services accordingly need to be viewed as an active tool, and individuals positively encouraged to use them. This requires rationing mind-sets to be replaced by active marketing strategies linked to cost-effective models of service delivery.

Third, career guidance is essentially a 'soft' rather than a 'hard' policy intervention. At its heart is the notion of the 'active individual': that individuals should be encouraged to determine their role in, and their contribution to, the society of which they are part. The **primacy of the individual's interests** is commonly a core principle in codes of practice for career guidance services. There are practical as well as ethical reasons for this, not least that such services can only serve the public good if they retain the confidence and trust of the individuals they serve. For policy-makers, this raises the issue of whether they expect practitioners to pursue the outcomes defined by policy objectives in their dealings with an individual client; or whether they are willing to support practitioners in addressing the individual's interests, in the confidence that, when aggregated, this will meet the public objectives too. Several countries in the reviews made a point of centring their definitions of career guidance around the needs of the individual. In principle, career guidance could be viewed (not only by economic liberals) as a classic case of Adam Smith's famous dictum that individuals encouraged to pursue their own interests are led by an 'invisible hand' to promote an end that is no part of their intention – the public interest – and to do so more effectually than when they intend to promote it. In this sense, career guidance services could represent Smith's 'invisible hand' made flesh. Their role is to not to determine what individuals should do, but to ensure that their decisions are well-informed (in terms of, among other things, the needs of the labour market) and well-thought-through. If there could be a clear understanding between policy-makers and practitioners on this issue, it would greatly enhance collaboration between the two.

Career guidance services have often in the past been viewed as marginal services in terms of public policy. Reviews by three influential international bodies have affirmed that this view is no longer adequate. Such services need now to be brought into the mainstream of

policy formation. A key challenge for this conference is to determine how this can be accomplished.

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