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Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems: Building the Stepping Stones
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The role of practitioners for improving access to and quality of guidance

I am very pleased that the organising Finish Ministry of Education invited me in my capacity as President of IAEVG and gives me the opportunity to make some comments at the end of this important professional meeting. When I looked through the agenda which reflects the European debate on guidance development of the last 5 years – including the Resolution - I found the same main policy issues which also were highlighted by IAEVG on the occasion of its 50 anniversary in the Paris Declaration on Educational and Vocational Guidance: IAEVG explicitly declared in 2001 and urged governments to secure easy and free access for all, to assure quality guidance delivery through competent counsellors and provide lifelong and life wide guidance systems based on the needs of the users and provide them with carer management skills – and also the value of guidance for achieving political goals were drawn in this Declaration – in referring to the interrelationship of human resource development and individual benefits of guidance. What 2001 was only an urgent appeal to governments the European Union succeeded to bring it into the form of a formal Resolution - a high level political paper with the legitimacy of the Education ministers and their commitment of strengthening guidance in their countries. And to keep guidance in the frame work of lifelong learning permanently on the political agenda is the great merit of the ongoing European debate.

I would like to focus mainly on two aspects of the debates of this conference – the practitioners role in career development and the need for involving users perspectives in the process of reshaping guidance policies and reforming service delivery. Both areas seems to be interrelated as the practitioner has special **intermediate position** within a system or service of guidance that bridges political aims to reality, laws to application and theory to praxis .

1. In the most countries there is often a framework for guidance delivery by **legislation or administrative regulations** with overall **political aims**.
2. In addition a service has its own **organisational structure** with a managerial order and very often **special operational goals** have to be achieved through the service.
3. The practitioners have to **respect the given political conditions** and have to work directly with those to whom the service is devoted: the users who might be differentiated in special target groups (young school leavers, job and training seekers, unemployed, disabled, disadvantaged etc). They have to meet the needs of their users and at the same time to implement both the political aims and the organisational goals what is difficult as both very often tend to be not congruent.

The **role of the practitioners** is very **complicated** as they very often are **between** the expectations of **organisation / service** (or even political aims) **and** the real needs of the **users** which often differs from each other.

Practitioners first recognise if there are **gaps between legal rights**, entitlements or policies and their implementation in the **reality** in their day-to-day work. “ Short- term goals take precedence over guidance for long-term career development” (stated re the PES by Sultana) which is often the case in PES when **placement is settled over guidance**. For example: Law guarantees a guidance offer according the needs of clients but in reality it cannot be achieved because of a shortage of personal resources in the service and organisational re-structuring which indeed decrease access. The practitioners within the service and also their professional association can open an internal and also public debate on this matter. It is very important to also highlight the role of career guidance for the development of employability of individuals and a sufficient work force in general. And therefore career guidance has to remain its vital position within PES as it is evident that a good placement needs a good guidance in advance.

Practitioners value high the **co-operation with other guidance partners** and **recognise immediately problems** for instance in **linkages** between education and labour sector. If regional restrictions in the concrete co-operation as lead to decreasing use. **Practitioners may alert schools, teachers and press** to finally led take back this (illegal) measures.

Practitioners need a substantial **basic training and permanent further training** to up-date their knowledge and skills according the changing training system and the labour market. They immediately **identify if they have lacks** in knowledge and methods and then call for better further training opportunities within the service. If they fail they are able to **self-manage** their further training through their professional association. A comprehensive and up-dated information provision is essential for quality guidance delivery. Although the information provision should remain an official task of the service provider **taking action and self-help of practitioners** is important as it stimulates re-action of the provider.

The initiatives for the foundation of a **National Guidance Forum** as they worked since 2004 should involve organisations, stakeholders and recognised professionals of guidance. They are often driven by non-governmental organisations, associations of professionals and users. This might lead to **more transparency for users**, to more intensive **co-operation between the providers** and to more efficient use of resources and in initiating **synergies of service delivery for the best of the users**. This is a good example how the practitioners can contribute to **broaden access to life wide guidance**.

Another aspect of the role of practitioners is their **self-critical view of the necessary qualification** (training, further training and supervision) they need for their guidance work and also the need for **common quality guidelines** or standards of guidance delivery which might be valid or at least recommended for all counsellors.

For example the German Practitioners Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance **dvb** has taken a good initiative to set up a **register of qualified counsellors** who have to demonstrate special requirements of professional initial qualification, regular up-date through continuing training and certified professional experience. In addition the dvb also submitted to politicians and parliament the **draft of a law** to regulate the **profession of career counsellor** - but until now it failed with this. The association took over for their members the Ethical Standards of IAEVG and has permanently been urging politics to establish a **quality assurance mechanism** for both the qualification of practitioners and the guidance delivery. This demand was also taken on board from the **National Forum** and submitted within the proposal to

the Ministry of Education. This is a good example how practitioners, their professional association and a National Forum can work together for professional aims which hopefully will lead to more transparency and better access to quality guidance services.

The German practitioners association also organised a political hearing and raised the question “ Who will assure quality career guidance for the future in Germany ”. This meeting was introduced by a key speech of the former President of Parliament who emphasised the high importance and role of a good guidance system for the individuals and the economy and society in Germany. Thus a follow up **discussion between policy and practice** was initiated and will continue.

Another good example how practitioners can make aware the important role of guidance and give public notice of guidance needs and stimulate the debate of policy and practice has happened in **Poland**. The Polish National Forum succeeded to motivate the Senat of the Polish Republic, the second chamber of Parliament, to organize and host a professional conference where in the presence of the Senators the impact of good guidance was discussed, for instance what guidance can contribute to solve social problems like youth unemployment.

These examples show us that the **role of practitioners** in broadening access to guidance has a **multi facet structure** and touches nearly all aspects of a guidance system. The inclusion of quality aspects focuses on the attractiveness of services and increases acceptance and access and underpin the users needs..

The following summary of actions might demonstrate the variety of measures from practitioners to widen access to and promote quality of guidance by

- **recognising and making publicly aware gaps** between political aims and reality in practice or even in failures or lack of legislation;
- **fighting for legal assurance of quality** of services **and qualification** of counsellors;
- **alerting public and policy makers** if false measures lead to quality loss, less access or failure of users needs;
- **identifying changing and real needs of users and of special target groups** among them and **giving feed back** to providers and policy makers;
- **advocating for special needs groups** like disabled, disadvantaged and youth-at-risk or migrants and promoting the use of **out-reach approaches**;
- **contributing to service improvement** and better working conditions through participation in evaluation of programmes and methods;
- **promoting own professional development** and those of colleagues through continuing training and up-date of professional knowledge, skills and use of ICT tools;
- **securing professional ethical behaviour** through commitment to a Code of Ethics;
- **co-operating with guidance workers in other areas** and also **seeking allies** (parents, teachers, social workers etc) to make guidance attractive to their users;
- **participating in networks** like a **National Forum** to represent the needs of the practice but also in projects or programmes of **European** or international level to learning from good practices;
- **strengthening influence of practitioners votes** through joining in a professional association;

- **signal shortages or restrictions in sourcing and staffing** of services.

If you agree with this picture of a **wide role of practitioners** involvement you also have to recognise the following **implications and challenges**:

- We have to **convince service providers** and policy makers of the benefits and **high value of the involvement of practitioners** both for organisational and conceptual developments.
- The **debate** and exchange of experiences **between policy and practice (including users and citizens involvement)** has to be enhanced, and also the **co-operation and communication** among the practitioners themselves.
- In the last 6 years we focussed more **on policy development** - and this is really of high importance - but it could easily be misunderstood as exclusively if we forget the **vital role of practitioners** to implement and execute such policies. There is a strong relationship between policy development and the implementation of policies into the practice.
- On **European and international level** we have to **foster the representation of practitioners** and strengthen their role and support the **involvement of professional associations on all levels**.
- The promotion of **common or comparable competencies** of counsellors and guidance workers and the creation of an **European accreditation scheme** could underpin the important role of guidance practitioners. This would include the development of **European Training Modules** which could be integrated in national curricula of counsellor training and further training. The users influence on guidance systems development could be supported if we focus also on the **out-put of guidance** – what users can/should be able to do to become competent for their own career management. Hereby the US Blue Print and the Canadian Standards can be seen as a good international example.
- We also should think to work on a **European Code of Ethics** – the IAEVG Ethical Standards already adopted by many countries - could function as a model.

I am very pleased to learn during this conference about the intention of the European Commission to catch the momentum for a **sustainable continuation** of the excellent work of the Lifelong Guidance Experts Group as a permanent and professional platform – and **practitioners view** should have a strong voice within this co-operation.

Again my cordial congratulations to the involved Finish Ministries and the organisers of this excellent seminar, the university of Jyväskylä, Dr. Raimo Vuorinen and his team.

As in the past IAEVG offers for the future its strong support for the further development of a professional co-operation and networking mechanism in Europe and can help to disseminate the European model as a good example for future guidance policy development in other parts of the world.