LIFELONG GUIDANCE POLICIES AND SYSTEMS: BUILDING THE STEPPING STONES

Finnish EU Presidency Conference: Jyväskylä
6-7 November 2006

CURRENT PROGRESS OF LIFELONG GUIDANCE POLICY AND PRACTICE INITIATIVES IN THE EU

Key findings and preliminary conclusions
from the synthesis of national and European material

—

Ronald G. Sultana
Director, Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research
University of Malta

Monday 6th November 12:00 – 12:30

This paper sets out to inform the Conference on the progress that Member States have attained in the provision of career guidance services to European citizens. My brief is to draw on the updates that have been provided by several countries[1], in order to note the achievements that have been chalked up since career guidance again attained policy visibility at international, European and national levels, thanks to a series of important initiatives which I have been very privileged to take part in, benefit from, and contribute to. It is important to briefly recall these initiatives, because this conference must be seen as a point in time along a continuum that started in 2000 with the OECD 14-country review, followed up by similar reviews using the same or slightly adapted survey instruments by the European Training Foundation (2002, 2006), CEDEFOP (2004), and a further review focusing on guidance in Public Employment Service settings commissioned last year by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (2006).

The sustained reflection on how career guidance can best respond to the demands of a knowledge-based economy, in ways that contribute both to the public and individual good, is inscribed in the comprehensive Education and Training 2010 Programme of the European Union, which aims to support the reforms and modernisation of education and training in the quest for increased prosperity and social cohesion in Europe. The reflection on the contribution that guidance can make to these twin goals has been steered by the Commission's Lifelong Guidance Expert Group. The Expert Group was instrumental in injecting new insights in the debate on career guidance and to disseminate these insights widely, drawing on Europe-wide expertise to articulate a vision for the field, to commission studies in areas that the surveys had shown were weak or

[1] A short questionnaire to structure the progress updates was designed by the Finnish conference organisers, and sent to 31 countries (the EU 25 plus Bulgaria, Iceland, Norway, Romania, Switzerland, Turkey). 20 responses have been received thus far (AT, CY, CZ, DK, EE, ES, FI, DE, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, RO, SE, SI, UK).

underdeveloped, and to work ceaselessly to connect research with policy and practice. A good example of this is the *Policy Handbook* co-published by the Commission and the OECD, and the Commission's *Common Reference Tools for Improving Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems*, drafted by the Expert Group and finalised by an Education and Training 2010 ministerial representative group, and subsequently endorsed by the ministries of the 25 countries. Other strategies to ensure policy learning were co-ordinated by CEDEFOP on behalf of the Expert Group, and included mutual learning meetings bringing together representatives from countries where notable progress had been made in addressing the gaps and weaknesses identified by the reviews. Participants at these three meetings shared best practice examples in relation to themes which are very much at the heart of our concerns at this conference, and included a focus on the development of career guidance provision across the lifespan, broadening access to services, ensuring that such services were marked by quality, and identifying relevant indicators and benchmarks that could be used in the quest for improved services to citizens. In reporting on progress achieved, I will be drawing on the key learning attained from all these reviews, reports, and initiatives. This necessarily brief reporting will be amplified in greater detail in a longer synthesis report that will be published by CEDEFOP next year.

A major achievement was the placing by the Irish Presidency of the EU of Lifelong Career Guidance on the agenda of the Council of Ministers which, in May 2004, passed a Resolution to which all Member States are signatory. The Resolution noted the several Reports, White Papers, Directives, Communiqués and other formal documents issued by the Commission which highlight the value of career guidance offered by the education and labour market sectors, as well as by social partner and community providers. Most importantly, the Resolution identified 5 key areas where progress needed to be registered if career guidance was to resonate with the needs of the economy and of citizens, and invited the Council and Representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council to commit themselves to reaching the objectives articulated. The response to that invitation was unanimously positive.

So much for the preliminaries. Now comes the core of what this conference is about: What does an analysis of the country updates tell us about the progress made in addressing the 5 key concerns extracted from the Resolution that are the focus for our discussions? Let me briefly recall what these 5 key concerns are. I will do so by articulating them as questions that a *user* of career guidance services would address to us.

This imaginary person would first of all remind us that, as a European citizen, he or she is an inheritor of an "arch of social dreaming", constructed by the struggle of generations before us in their attempt to manage the vicissitudes of life, by drawing upon all their resources in order to ensure that humanity's experience of life is not, to quote Hobbes, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". The context for the following concerns, as well as the motivation for addressing them, is to ensure that at a stage of the development of the world and European economy where past certainties and securities are increasingly conspicuous by their absence, and where we learn to live in what has been termed a 'risk society', citizens have the skills both to manage their lives and to exploit the new

opportunities that become available. But this purposeful exercise of autonomy in negotiating life's challenges needs to be accompanied by a commitment to solidarity, perhaps the outstanding element in the so-called European model—or let us call it adventure—that we have all embarked on, and where the concern with producing wealth and resources in a sustainable and ecologically responsible manner is ensconced within a commitment to distribute such wealth and resources in ways that safeguard the human dignity of all. Career guidance as we currently conceive it responds—or ought to respond—to both imperatives: it should facilitate autonomy by equipping citizens with the lifeskills needed to manage educational and occupational pathways, and it should provide the support required throughout life, when and where needed.

With this background and context in mind, let us turn to the questions that our imaginary citizen would ask us if he or she were to be given the floor, and if she or he had to focus on the 5 key issues highlighted by the Guidance Resolution, i.e. Coherence, Access, Information, Career Management Skills, and Quality:

Question 1: Coherence
To what extent are you providing me with a service that supports me both at key transition and decision-making points, and accompanies more generally throughout the lifespan? Do you succeed in working together across sectors, and at local, regional and national levels, in order provide me with the resources and support that I may need, at any point in my life, and in ways that make the service transparent, organic, and easy to access and use as I move into and out of education, training and work?

Question 2: Access
Are the services that you design available to me, even if I live in remote and hard-to-reach areas, or if my own particular life-circumstances make access in regular ways difficult to achieve? Can you cater for my career guidance needs if I am disabled? Have you developed ways of reaching out to persons like myself who wish to return to work after a period out of employment, due to child-minding commitments, or for some other reason (including illness, long-term unemployment, incarceration)? Do I have access to your services if I am not linked to the internet, or if I find it difficult to use regular institutionalised approaches because I am what you would call 'a drop-out?'

Question 3: Information
How successful are you in producing and disseminating the information that I need to be aware of the range of opportunities available to me and to guide me in making wise choices? What strategies have you developed to ensure that this information and this guidance is marked by quality, is constantly updated, monitored and evaluated, and meets my needs?

Question 4: Career management skills
How are you making sure that, as I move through educational and occupational pathways, I have access to training in the skills that I need to manage my learning as well as my career development over time?

Question 5: Quality
To what extent are you trying to strengthen the policies and systems that cater for providing me with career guidance, by ensuring that they are informed by research, based on best available evidence, and delivered by a well-trained and reflective group of practitioners?

What I will attempt to do in the next 25 minutes or so is to answer the questions of this rather bold and inquisitive citizen—who, by the way, could be your partner, your son or daughter, your neighbour, or yourself. How well, then, are we doing in providing career guidance services that respect the goals identified as being important by what is arguably the most extensive research exercise on career guidance that has ever been carried out, and which are so clearly and sharply echoed in the Guidance Resolution? These answers will provide us with some of the substance that we will need in order to make the discussions of each of these 5 concerns during the workshops this afternoon more relevant, more effective, and more fruitful.

First, it would seem to me to be necessary to reassure our imaginary citizen that the Career Guidance field has not remained passive in front of the challenges confronting it. The country updates, together with the rich material generated by the initiatives referred to earlier, clearly indicate that some countries are trying very hard indeed to deliver services that accompany citizens throughout their lifespan, that are more ubiquitous and accessible, that are quality assured, that provide the skills needed to manage career and learning pathways, and that come together in ways that make the offer coherent, transparent and professionally delivered. There has been much deliberation and reflection on the field, with several countries commissioning evaluative and analytic surveys (e.g. DE, EE, FI, IE, IT, LT, MT, NL, SE, RO, UK [England]), while others have organised, or are organising, major conferences to discuss key aspects of career guidance services (e.g. DE, FI, LV, MT, NL, UK [Scotland]). Linked to these critical and reflective exercises has been policy development, achieved through legislation in some cases (e.g. DK, ES, FI), or through the publication of strategic policy frameworks (e.g. LT, MT, UK [Northern Ireland]). Part of the focus has been on responding to a situation where the demand for services outstrips supply, and where the challenge is not only to reach more citizens, but also to broaden and deepen access to a variety of groups of users, particularly those considered to be at risk (e.g. DK, FI, IE, SE, SI). Many, especially the New Member States, have gone to great lengths to improve information on the educational and labour market offer, putting the new information technology to good use in order to democratise access to vital knowledge.

There has also been some serious research and thought invested in trying to come up with quality assurance systems and tools (e.g. DK, IE, UK, LT)—a most demanding challenge given that the nature and complexity of career guidance does not make effectiveness or outcomes easily susceptible to measurement. Most countries have reported an increased investment in staff training at initial, induction and in-service stages (FI, IE, IT, MT, RO), while some proudly showcased enhanced guidance provision in schools, as well as in Public Employment Services. The latter's adoption of personal service model has given great scope for the embedding of career guidance elements in tasks that were

previously more administrative in nature, without diminishing the importance of specialised and deeper interventions with clients. Compared to the situation when we first carried out the guidance reviews, many more countries report having National Guidance Forums or Councils, specifically set up to co-ordinate different providers at national and/or regional levels (e.g. DE, EE, FI, IE, IT, MT, LT, LV, NO, SI). Some have also founded research centres focusing on career guidance, in order to provide the intellectual leadership that is necessary in order to steer policy and practice (e.g. FI).

There are many factors driving these developments. Certainly, tight labour markets have led policy-makers to turn to career guidance, seeing it as a mechanism to improve the fit between supply and demand for skills, a way of overcoming frictional unemployment, and a strategy for empowering and activating citizens on the periphery of the labour market. Within education, concerns with early school-leaving and with costly course-changing has foregrounded the use of career guidance in orienting students towards more fulfilling pathways, re-motivating them to invest in learning, and pointing the path to social and economic integration. In many cases, the career guidance reviews, the Reference Tools, and the commitment to implementing Lifelong Learning strategies, have stimulated policy learning and a Europe-wide quest for innovative solutions. Some have been particularly successful in drawing on European Social Funds and on the Regional Development Fund in order to implement ground-breaking initiatives from which we all can learn.

So, ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that we do have a vibrant and dynamic career guidance field across Europe, and a first, broad conclusion would be that most countries are tackling many of the concerns and issues signalled by the Resolution, some more successfully than others. Let us give some substance to this broad conclusion, by looking in detail at each of the 5 key areas in turn.

Implementing Lifelong Guidance Systems

All the evidence we have at hand is that we do not, at this moment, have a fully implemented, integrated career guidance system in Europe, i.e. one that assimilates the majority of aims, principles and building blocks as articulated in the Common European Reference Tools, and as depicted in the diagram in the Annex to this presentation. Of course, what is being proposed here is not a disembodied blue-print that is equally relevant and applicable, irrespective of specificities of context. However, if guidance is to move away from being a collection of disparate sub-systems, each with its own history, rationale and driving focus, and become instead a coherent and integrated set of arrangements, then certainly there are some features that we need to build into our linked provision.

There have been some interesting developments over the past years in the design and implementation of more holistic approaches that take a lifespan approach. The “all age” services in the UK of Northern Ireland, Wales, and especially of Scotland are particularly promising in this regard. Spain too has established “integrated centres”, co-financed by the employment and education sectors, which include a career information and guidance

service, as well as an APL service, offered to a broad range of clients, regardless of their age. The more comprehensive report that I am preparing for CEDEFOP and which will be available some time in the middle of next year will provide detailed descriptions of these systems. In this context, suffice it to mention that Careers Scotland, for instance, which I have had the privilege of visiting in September, has extensive services and products in order to meet client needs in secondary schools, vocational colleges, and universities, in town centres, employment services, as well as enterprises, using the latest communications technology to guarantee access which, in the Highlands and Islands, is a particularly important achievement given the remoteness of some of the communities there. The models underpinning guidance provision, the use of branded, effectively marketed and attractive products as Career Box, and the very active networking between the different sites at which guidance is offered means that the citizen has little difficulty in recognising the offer, in getting access to it, and in identifying it as a steady and reliable source of support throughout key decision-making steps in his or her life.

Other countries are gradually recognising the value of overcoming the divide between provision in the different sectors which, as the career guidance reviews have pointed out, lead to several serious inadequacies. Chief among these are costly duplication at a time when resources cannot keep up with the demand for services; and separate databases which fail to consolidate the information about educational offers with career and labour market information, and which therefore end up frustrating users in their attempt to make decisions by taking as many variables as possible into consideration.

The country reports indicate that there is an increasing realisation of the need to design more holistic approaches, but that countries are at different stages in their journey towards this goal. Some are planning to put into place a national co-ordination strategy. Austria, for instance, is planning joint conference and training events, making good use of European Social Funding for this purpose. Italy, which had, in the earlier reporting exercise feeding the guidance reviews, expressed its concern at the deep differences in the extent and quality of its guidance provision in its regions, is now planning for an overall entity to co-ordinate the field and to ensure networked services at a regional level as well. Cyprus too has declared its intention to intensify its efforts in order to ensure a more systematic, organically linked guidance organisation—something which, in theory, should be easier to achieve given the size of its population. Other countries have gone one step further, and are formally embedding the imperative to co-ordinate services to ensure more seamless provision either in legal instruments (CZ, ES, LU), in service procedures (DK's Youth and Regional Guidance Centres), or in Joint Ministerial strategy papers (LV, LT) and protocols (RO). Our experience from monitoring the previous guidance reviews suggests that formal commitments, even if they find expression in legislation, are no guarantee that implementation will follow, so it will be interesting to see whether such commendable plans lead to systems development over the next few months.

A series of promising initiatives have been reported by several countries in their attempt to design or, in some cases, re-design structures for promoting national and regional partnerships in career guidance provision. Some—like DE, EE, FI, IE, LV, MT and SI—

have set up national and, in some cases, also regional Guidance Forums, which was one of the key recommendations of both the OECD and Commission reviews. The support offered by the Commission through its Joint Actions programme has therefore had a positive impact on these countries, as well as on other participants in the two collaborative projects that were set up, one under the leadership of the UK's Guidance Council (and involving DK, EE, IE, MT, SI), the other led by Austria (and involving FI, PO, DE, CZ and FR). These initiatives are immensely promising, particularly in those cases where clear, strategic and time-bound goals have been agreed to by all partners, and where there is monitoring of outcomes. Some of them are still however somewhat fragile, and it seems clear that continued networking at EU level is important to maintain their momentum. Other promising building blocks in the attempt to construct a more organic and linked service are the piloting of regional partnerships to provide career guidance in Norway, and the setting up in other countries of guidance research and leadership centres to provide strategic leadership (DK, FI, LT).

The progress reports feeding this synthesis also indicate a series of initiatives which, while less structural in nature, do nevertheless have the potential of providing the impetus for systems development. Some are consolidating labour market data onto one website, and working on integrating this with career guidance information and tools in user-friendly ways (e.g. DK, LT, SE, SI). Others have developed training courses that bring together staff from both the education and labour market sector, in order to promote a culture of co-operation, and to enhance awareness of each other's work contexts (e.g. MT, NO). Yet others are developing closer linkages between schools and public employment services in their attempt to provide more relevant services effectively to their clients (SE, RO, SI).

Broadening Access to Career Guidance

All the European and international country case studies and reviews that we have in hand strongly indicate that the demand for career guidance far exceeds supply of services. This is not surprising. In the education sector, pathways are becoming more diversified and complex, with students having increasing opportunities to try out courses, to switch between study units and even between institutions, and to follow a tailor-made and individualized education plan. Needless to say, guidance is called upon to make a contribution in this context, as it is in the intensified efforts to prevent early school leaving. In the employment sector, not only does restructuring of the labour market require a re-engagement with education and training at different points in one's life, but the very design of occupations necessitates the pro-active planning and management of one's own career development over time. Several categories of people who are at risk of social exclusion, or who have special needs due to the fact that they live in remote communities, or due their tenuous links to citizenship rights, also can benefit from guidance—and yet, access to these services is either difficult, or provided in inadequate ways given the pressure on staff and material resources.

The country responses that have been tabled to inform this conference indicate that there have been several initiatives launched in an attempt to broaden access. We can outline these initiatives under 5 headings.

First are those attempting to *expand services*. Given that most of the respondents came from, and focused on the education sector, the initiatives that we have learnt most about in this particular data collection exercise relate to schools. CZ has established several new guidance units for students in educational institutions, and will be expanding the number even further over the coming years. Interestingly, compared to the information we obtained from the earlier reviews, quite a number of initiatives are directed at university level students (e.g. CZ, ES, LT, NL, NO, RO). More generally, a key strategy being adopted by some countries is to free up scarce resources by expanding self-help services. The material from the Guidance in PES report indicates that public employment services have adopted three ways to broaden access. These include a resort to partnership and outsourcing; a shift to self-service modes of delivery; and the introduction of tiering and differentiated services, providing access in self-access modes and in groups to the majority of clients, reserving to the rest more intensive individual career guidance interviews if and when needed. Increasingly too, guidance for adults in PES and CVET contexts includes the accreditation of prior learning as well as 'skills balance' (e.g. DE, ES, FI, NL)—another indication that the guidance field is evolving towards providing enhanced services to a broader range of clients.

Another response by several countries in their attempts to broaden access has been to *target services* towards specific groups and categories of clients. Many have developed innovative strategies to reach out to disadvantaged youths through mentoring schemes (as in DK), or through specially-designed workshops that engage young people on their own terms, and outside formal institutional contexts that tend to be associated with negative experiences (FI). Another target group is early school-leavers, where the PES strategy of personal action planning has been adopted to encourage students to develop a 'personal development plan' (DK), or and 'individual education plan' (IE), thus trying to put into place preventive measures (as in LT) rather than merely 'curative' ones. Several countries have also expanded or reinforced access to guidance to groups that have traditionally had lesser opportunities to benefit from specialized services, including immigrants (e.g. FI), travellers (IE), offenders (UK) and persons with disabilities (ES, NL, SE).

A third set of initiatives to facilitate access, which was also much in evidence in the earlier reviews, is the *enhanced use of ICT*. This is of course linked to the new emphasis on self-access and self-help modes of delivery, and it is difficult—on the basis of the information we have from the country reports that have reached us—to judge the extent to which there has been any major leap forward since 2004 in this area. It is clear, though, that all countries have made important investments in the provision of digital information, and many report improved websites (e.g. ES), new guidance services via e-mail (e.g. DK, NL, UK), and the use of call centres (e.g. DE-Hamburg; UK [England]). In a number of cases, too, ICT is being used to reach out to remote communities, offering

guidance services through video-conferencing, as in the case of Careers Scotland in the Highlands and Islands, and of some public employment services in SE.

The final two sets of initiatives are strongly linked, but I deal with them separately in order to emphasise a point. Many countries have broadened access by *reaching out to communities* in pro-active ways. Some have set up sub-national outlets and service points. This is the case with LV, CY, DE, LT and SE. DK is using what it refers to as 'neutral localities'—such as municipal libraries, for instance—in order ensure that there are no barriers to access on the part of those who might otherwise find difficulty with approaching guidance staff in formal offices.

Linked to this reaching out process is the attempt to *market services* more effectively. The Guidance Resolution states that: 'Services need to be available at times and in forms which will encourage all citizens to continue to develop their skills and competences throughout their lives, linked to changing needs in the labour market.' It adds: 'Such services need to be viewed as an active tool, and individuals should be positively encouraged to use them.' This places the issue of marketing centre-stage. In their responses, however, only two countries (AT, UK) highlighted the importance of this strategy to broaden access. This may be understandable given that guidance staff in the education sector are traditionally used to working with a 'captive audience', so to speak. Indeed, much more emphasis on marketing of services came through the guidance in PES study, where innovative strategies to advertise the guidance offer were reported, including use of street billboards, of TV talk shows and reality shows, of cellular phones, of teletext services, and of high profile advertising campaigns during prime time radio and television. The new paradigm of lifelong guidance, the wealth of career guidance resources available through the self-help and self-access modes, as well as the increasing broad range of services on offer, require an enhanced effort to ensure that citizens are as fully aware as possible of the support that is available to them, and of the ways that such support can be accessed. Marketing of services is therefore closely linked to the principles of entitlement, transparency, as well as client empowerment.

Strengthen Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The Guidance Resolution reaffirms the concern that the career guidance reviews had foregrounded regarding the relative lack of quality assurance in the provision of services. The analysis of the situation regarding quality assurance across Europe led to the conclusion that few countries, if any, had introduced comprehensive QA mechanisms, and that most QA practices that were in place were in fact restricted. Further analysis of data in preparation for the mutual learning meeting organised by CEDEFOP in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education in January this year indicated that QA approaches in the guidance field are restricted because:

- They tend to be confined to a single or small range of sectors within a country – they rarely if ever apply across *both* the education *and* employment sector.
- There are few mechanisms to ensure *effective co-ordination* between agencies and between ministries, and this makes coherent monitoring of approaches to QA in guidance difficult. The increasing use of outsourcing renders this issue

particularly topical, and raises concerns about the extent to which the citizen is at risk, with no specific protection or redress.

- QA strategies currently in place do not comprehensively target the whole *range of clients* (different age groups; different target citizen groups; different regional contexts) that guidance services are meant to cater for.
- Present QA systems are also restricted if one considers the *range of activities* that career guidance can involve. In most cases, the main focus is on *informing* and *assessing*.
- QA approaches to career guidance also tend to be restricted in the sense that they do not focus on career guidance and information as such, but rather deal with them *as part of an overall range of services* (e.g. a review of a Public Employment Service, or of a school, which considers career information and guidance as one element among others in a string of responsibilities they are accountable for). Sensitivity to and knowledge of career guidance issues by the evaluation team may, in such cases, be limited. In this regard, for instance, the Netherlands is developing a thematic focus on guidance for school inspectors.

Other aspects of QA which are of relevance to us as we consider the extent to which we are measuring up to the target of improving quality assurance in guidance include the fact that even where QA elements tend to be more present—i.e. in the employment sector—often the preoccupation here is with the attainment of such *quantitative* targets as swift and successful placement in employment, rather than with qualitative measures which are more appropriate for evaluating processes and service quality. Where QA strategies and mechanisms for career information and guidance are in place in the education sector, they are often *voluntary* rather than mandatory in nature. Few have adopted QA systems that not only set standards and targets, but also make arrangements for monitoring compliance, and for implementing sanctions or corrective procedures in the case of failure to meet the standards and targets set. Such 'soft'/advisory guidelines tend do not, therefore, provide quality guarantees, nor do they give citizens an entitlement to quality service, or to the right to redress.

There are therefore clear deficits in the guidance field when it comes to quality assurance, though the point must be strongly made—and here we echo the conclusions of the mutual learning meeting on Indicators held in Nuremberg in October last year—that attempts to monitor guidance services, or to generate indicators that provide evidence of targeted outcomes, are notoriously difficult. Guidance is a complex human activity, aspects of which are difficult to measure, particularly in quantitative terms. In addition, guidance is often enmeshed in other activities (education, personal counselling, etc), and difficult if not impossible to isolate for the purposes of establishing causal relationships (e.g. between guidance provision and 'drop-out' rates).

Despite such difficulties, the country reports at hand provide us with evidence that some progress is being registered nevertheless. The country reports that reached us indicate that attention is being given to several aspects of the quality assurance field. Much of the emphasis is being placed on three areas.

Increasingly, countries are carrying *client-satisfaction surveys*. These, when carried out in methodologically sound ways, have potential in providing important feedback to the system. Two issues arise, here: first, client satisfaction is a necessary but not sufficient measure of quality in service provision; second, there is evidence that many systems have a greater capacity of producing data than in analysing and using it to drive change in service provision.

Second, a good number of countries reported that they have recently carried out *evaluative surveys* (e.g. AT, DE, EE, FI, IE, NL, SE). Here the issue is that while such evaluations may be useful in sensitising career guidance systems about key weaknesses and limitations, they often fail to generate the self-critical culture and the implementation of on-going evaluation procedures that are the basis of most QA systems.

Third, many of the countries reported that they attempt to ensure quality through *staff training*, with many describing increased investment at initial, induction and in-service stages (AT, CY, DK, EE, ES, FI, IE, IT, MT, RO). Some are experimenting with innovative delivery methods such as e-learning (CZ, IE) and the setting up of internet forums enabling practitioners to exchange good practice (DK, FI, LT, SE, UK). Other countries are further professionalising the field through, for instance, establishing registers of qualified practitioners (e.g. EE, RO). While of course fully fledged QA systems have to subsume professional qualifications within them, it is also clear that the latter do not necessarily guarantee quality. Moreover, the evidence is that few if any countries have a comprehensive system of qualifications across *every* guidance sector, and that many of the qualifications obtained are not specifically in career guidance, but rather in fields (e.g. psychology, sociology, labour market studies) which at best overlap with – and contribute to – the knowledge and competence base required by CG providers, but do not guarantee it. Furthermore, reliance on professionalisation of staff as a way of ensuring quality is problematic when there is no systematic approach to continued professional development, supervision and appraisal.

This is where another group of countries have registered some progress. More rigorous QA monitoring is ensured through an increasingly broad range of strategies, including the development of QA manuals and guidelines (e.g. DK, IE), the placing of outcomes of quality auditing exercises on public websites to ensure transparency (e.g. DK, IE), the generating of a profile of services along a set of indicators of effectiveness that are constantly scrutinized (e.g. DK, FI), and through e-survey tools and on-line evaluation tools to collect feedback data and to establish benchmarks (DK, FI). One of the more variegated approaches to QA is to be found in the UK, which makes of EFQM and Charter Mark standards, but also employs more innovative approaches that specifically target guidance-related issues and processes, such as the Matrix standard, focused inspection, and case study approaches, as well as mystery shopping.

Learning and Career Management

The Guidance Resolution affirmed as a priority the need to refocus "guidance provision *to develop citizens' lifelong and lifewide learning and management skills* as an integral

part of education and training programmes" and to encourage educators and trainers "to *promote reflective learning techniques and autonomous learning***,** in order to enable young people and adults to self-manage their learning and career paths effectively." The emphasis here—as it is in the Member States' framework for key competences for lifelong learning—is on the development of meta-cognitive skills—in our case, those meta skills needed to plan and to manage the *development* of one's learning and work. This stress on the need for developing competences in managing career and learning is inspired, I would argue, by a desire to empower citizens to understand and gain some control over conditions generated by what I earlier referred to as a 'risk society', where lifelong job tenure and guaranteed economic security are an increasingly threatened feature in the social contract between the state and the individual. In such a context, guidance can be seen as one aspect of the state's duty to provide support to its citizens as they navigate the challenging social and economic vicissitudes of contemporary life.

Traditionally, school guidance focused on key transition or cut-off points as students moved through the education system, and decisions had to be made as to which subject clusters to study, or which schools to move on to. A lifelong guidance perspective both broadens and deepens the remit of school guidance services, in that *the goal becomes that of promoting self-reflective, autonomous and skilled decision-making*. Several countries across Europe have introduced a focus on career education at the lower secondary level, either as a separate curricular subject or integrated into a broader subject or included in one or more different study areas. The country progress reports indicate that there has been a spate of reforms that provide new or additional curricular space in order to develop self-awareness and self-management skills (e.g. CY, EE, FI, MT). Especially promising are the experiential learning pedagogies that are being mobilised in order to ensure that such skills are learnt in meaningful and effective ways. Progress country reports refer to strategies to engage students in 'personal career planning' and in developing a 'personal career journey' (LU, NO, SE, UK [Scotland]); to devise an 'individual transition plan' (DK); to become 'protagonists of a life project' (IT). Others are using portfolios or 'logbooks' (DK, FI, LU, SE) in order to develop those meta-cognitive skills that are needed to bring together the different inputs about work made in different subject areas, facilitating a more purposive and self-reflective approach to educational and career development and decision-making. In some cases (e.g. FI), these portfolios are electronic or web-based, and as such have the potential of integrating work- and education-related information in ways that enable students to compare the information they have about themselves with other data-sets. More broadly, several reports referred to the fact that their education systems are restructuring their pedagogical approaches to encourage autonomous learning (e.g. AT, IE), a task in which mastery of ICT is a critical enabling component (e.g. FI, SE, IE).

Particularly promising are those initiatives which attempt to ensure that students adopt a lifelong orientation towards learning and career development by introducing *competency frameworks* or *curricular guidelines*. In this way, the key skills needed by students in the shift to a self-reflective and autonomous learning which are central to the paradigm shift in guidance are set out in a systematic and structured manner. One example of such a framework is the National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance for those

aged 11-19 in UK (England). Finland and Ireland also reported the publication of new curricular guidelines that support the development of learning and career management skills.

Despite such progress, three key points need to be made.

First is that fact that large groups of students have limited access to support in managing career and learning. The reports at hand do not provide us with much optimism in relation to the concerns expressed by the earlier reviews that guidance support is underdeveloped in the VET sector. The assumption is presumably being made that VET students have already chosen their educational and occupational path, and that they therefore have less need for support. This takes little account of notions of lifelong learning and occupational mobility. Neither does it take account of the increasing flexibility that is included in upper secondary and higher VET programmes, or of the wide range of career options and jobs that can flow from broadly designed vocational education and training.

Second, despite an awareness of the need for a paradigm shift in service provision, where lifelong career management has become critically important, public employment services are still under great pressure to focus mainly on the out-of-work. While there is little reporting on the labour market sector in the progress reports, we do have fresh data from the recent survey of guidance provision in Public Employment Services (Sultana & Watts, 2005). This has clearly shown the extent to which the PES in Europe need to respond to the challenge arising from the necessity to open up their guidance services to embrace a more long-term, life-long perspective—one that is more in tune with the needs of citizens in the emergent knowledge economy where individuals increasingly move through occupational and training pathways in more complex, non-linear ways.

My third point is a cautionary note. I personally endorse the Resolution's emphasis on the need to develop skills for self-directed steering of one's learning and career development throughout life. However, the image of a smart, entrepreneurial individual capable of navigating the stormy waters of fast-changing and insecure labour markets, and purposefully making choices from among the opportunities available, has to be tempered by the realisation that such opportunities are often determined by the vitality or otherwise of the economy and sometimes by the social milieu of which the individual is a part. A lifelong guidance system that is wary of the tendency of some states to curtail welfare guarantees would argue that while individuals and groups need to develop the competences to manage career and learning in self-reflective and purposive ways, they need to do so within supportive, resourced environments. In other words, and to echo the point I made strongly at the outset, autonomy does indeed need to be balanced by solidarity.

Strengthening Structures for Policy and Systems Development

Much of the progress that we as policy-makers, practitioners and researchers would like to see in the area of career guidance, and which has been sign-posted by the Guidance Resolution, can really only be achieved if the structures supporting policy and systems

development are strengthened. The guidance reviews carried out between 2000 and 2004 indicated very clearly that a key failing in the field is strong, strategic and purposeful leadership in the area. Without such leadership, and without systems that sustain development through research and innovation, there is the danger that many of the excellent initiatives that we have paid tribute to today, and which we will have occasion to showcase in the workshops this afternoon, remain ad hoc, and dependent on the good will of individuals, whose access to resources is only assured throughout the lifetime of the project. Such initiatives have little hope of developing to scale, and of making the systemic impact that helps shift the paradigm through which career guidance is offered.

Policy and systems development can be supported in diverse ways. We have already noted the immense value of having providers coming together at a national and/or regional level to form a Guidance Forum or Council in order to systematically and purposefully share their concerns, aspirations and strategic objectives together, and to devise ways of collaborating, in articulating clear visions for the field, and in influencing policy- and decision-makers. I have had the privilege, through my association with one of the Joint Actions projects supported by the Commission, and led by the UK Guidance Council, to see the benefits that can accrue from the setting up of National Guidance Forums, and the ambitious action plans they have set out for the development of career guidance—some of which, I should add, are already being realised.

Professional associations and research centres can also have a major impact on the field, and some of the country progress reports did refer to such developments, such as the research centres in England and Finland, the new Expert Centre in Denmark, and the association that was launched in Lithuania in 2005, and the Confederation of Guidance Associations launched in Spain in the same year. My impression is that examples of such strategic bodies that attempt to bridge policy and practice, are few and far between, and that much more needs to be done in order to shape the field at national levels. Other less structured forms of professional networking were described by the progress country reports. These are the grass-roots, bottom-up initiatives organised by practitioners themselves, such as the internet forums where issues are debated (e.g. LT, SE, UK), and where examples of successful practice are shared or placed in a databank (DK, FI). This kind of activity is clearly to be commended, since it is practitioners who are closest to citizens and who are best placed to test out the soundness and wisdom of policy directions, as well as to develop innovative ideas in response to emerging challenges and environments. From the perspective of systems and policy development, the earlier caveat concerning the sustainability and impact of such micro-initiatives is also relevant to this case.

Some promising initiatives were reported in the setting up of structures at trans-national levels. These are interesting projects that can facilitate policy learning across the EU and beyond. Examples of these are regional networks, such as: the one for Nordic-Baltic Euroguidance centres encouraging exchange of good practice and involving seven countries (DK, EE, FI, IS, LV, NO, SE); the South European Initiative for Guidance, which envisages bringing together ten countries in the region (including BG, CY, EL, ES, FR, IT, MT, PT, RO, TR); EU networks such as ACADEMIA and EQUAL; and the

European Guidance and Counselling Research Forum supporting the on-line collaboration of guidance practitioners, researchers and policy-makers in five partner countries (DK, EE, FI, SL, UK). These initiatives in a sense foreshadow the European Network on Lifelong Guidance, which we hope will be formally launched next year, and which could potentially play a strategically critical role in fostering European cooperation, knowledge creation and transfer, in liaising with National Guidance Forums and other key actors, in impacting on national and EU-level policy making, and in monitoring further progress in implementing the Council Resolution on Lifelong Guidance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, are we in a position to reassure our imaginary citizen that the signposts and targets set by the Guidance Resolution, in order to provide him and her with the quality support services as we have described them, are in fact being delivered? The country progress reports indicate that much has been done, and that there are lead initiatives and star projects that should help us chart a course for the future of the field. May we all be inspired by each other's commitment, innovation and drive—but may we also recognise the limitations and gaps that we have collectively tried to identify, in order to ensure that this much talked about shift to a lifelong career guidance paradigm becomes a reality in all of our Member States.

Annex

Aspects of a national Lifelong Guidance System