

Conference on Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems: Building the Stepping Stones

Jyväskylä, 5-6 November 2006

Guidance Policy Development within Public Employment Services in the EU **Elisabet Arp DG EMPL**

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Jyväskylä and Finland today – the native country of my mother – to introduce and share in what way Guidance Policy continuously develops within the PES of Europe, and what role PES play as a delivery mechanism for the European Guidelines in the lifelong learning perspective.

The Lisbon strategy has been reviewed and refocused last year on growth and jobs and cast into an integrated set of guidelines for macro-micro-and employment policies. Member States have adopted and presented their Lisbon National Reform Programmes already last year in response to the renewed Guideline package for 2005—08, which highlights investment in Human Resources and Lifelong learning as a key priority for boosting growth and jobs in Europe. Lifelong learning is at the forefront of EU and national policy agendas.

Despite this, a continuous discussion has to be carried out on what needs to be done to move further in the right direction when it comes to improving the employability of the work-force over their life-cycle and on their adaptability to structural changes.

The Public Employment Service is one player in the national context and the role of PES as a delivery mechanism to reach the Lisbon targets becomes more and more obvious.

The PES, both as a partner organisation and as a stand-alone public service, have a central role in implementing the new Lisbon Strategy. Within the framework of the EES, the European employment Guidelines view lifelong learning as one of the pillars of active employability policies and promote early guidance intervention for new unemployed entrants to the labour market, or for recently unemployed persons as one of the key actions to prevent flow into long term unemployment.

The EU Commission initiated a network between the European PES which has been operating since the introduction of the EES. The objective for the network is to share best-practice and experiences in different fields of PES services in order to reach the goals of the EES more efficiently. Each year the network between the PES expresses an ambition in a work programme to highlight essential matters, and it is within this context that a study on Career Guidance within European PES was introduced and carried out by DG Employment, Social affairs and Equal Opportunities last year.

The study covered PES in the 25 MS plus IS, NO and CH and examined how effective PES services are from a qualitative perspective, and the study also identified some challenges for PES.

The study was initiated by my predecessor in this position; a very knowledgeable person in the field, Mr. Frank Kavanagh. Mr. Kavanagh is present at this conference, and I am sure he is willing to share the discussion behind initiating the study and on the results.

The study was carried out by Tony Watts and Ronald Sultana, and a specific workshop is organised during afternoon providing with a possibility to share and discuss the findings of the study and to focus on guidance within PES.

In many countries, many of the main career guidance services are located within PES, and substantial public resources are invested in these services. Therefore, PES have a significant influence on the extent and the nature of the career guidance available to citizens.

The place of career guidance within PES is not always an easy one as PES are required not only to help individuals make decisions, but also to make institutional decisions about individuals. Such role combinations can of course lead to conflicts. However, jobseekers guidance needs is a part of the core work within PES and has, and has always had, a central position within PES.

While there has been a trend in some countries for career guidance activities within PES to be integrated into more broadly-based roles, in other countries the training provision for staff in career guidance roles is being much supported and enhanced.

In principle, role separation allows for a greater degree of specialisation in service delivery while role integration allows for a more holistic service delivery.

PES also has a dual role which is a challenge to deal with. On one hand to work with the opening up of as many pathways as possible into work, on the other hand placing clients into employment as soon as possible.

These are some challenges identified in the study which indicate that the study has raised many questions for the PES to discuss for itself. One opportunity to do so is provided during the workshop this afternoon raising questions like: - what is the place of career guidance in the whole range of services offered by PES, - new developments of staff training etc.

I am happy to know that 21 persons at this Conference represent European PES.

However, these days in Jyväskylä also provide with a somewhat unique opportunity to examine the links between PES and others. It is a good moment to look closer at the links between the different stakeholders and maybe also to identify an agenda for future and to have a common concern on how the citizen best can be served.

After this introduction to 'Guidance Policy Development within PES', I would like to leave the floor to Ms. Patricia Curtin from the Irish PES; FAS. She illustrates the network between the PES in Europe and the Commission and she will further develop in what way the guidance services are provided by PES.

Thank you for your attention.