

Shaping the Future: Connecting Career Development and Workforce Development (International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, Sydney, 2006)

Synthesis of Country Papers

SESSION 2 (THEME A): CONNECTING CAREER DEVELOPMENT TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

1. Terms of reference

1.1 The country teams were asked to select and address two or three of six themes:

- Human capital.
- Labour supply.
- Employability skills.
- Career development services for workforce development.
- Older workers.
- The evidence base.

1.2 In practice, the detailed questions listed in the briefing document for the first four of these themes were diffuse, and overlapped with one another. As a result, material included in many of the country papers under the first three of these themes related more closely to the fourth theme (career development services).

1.3 In the light of this, the conceptual framework for the first four themes listed in 1.1 has been altered for the purposes of this synthesis. Theme A (addressed here) covers the conceptual links between these themes, which in effect establish the policy arguments for career development services in the context of workforce development. This will be followed by three reframed themes focusing on career development policies and services, but distinguishing three levels of such policies and services:

- *Workforce preparation*: Policies and services designed to support the career development of young people and develop their employability skills prior to entering the labour market (Theme B: Career development for young people).
- *Workforce adaptability*: Policies and services designed to encourage employers to support the career development of their employees (Theme C: Career development for adults at work).
- *Workforce reintegration*: Policies and services designed to support the career development of adults and develop their employability skills, which do not work directly through employers (Theme D: Career development for adults re-entering work).

The term 'workforce development' is sometimes used in a restricted sense to cover only the second of these; here it is used to cover all three (cf. also the definition in 3.1 below).

1.4 The other two themes – older workers (Theme E: Career development and older workers) and the evidence base (Theme F: Career development: the evidence base and professional infrastructure) – remain much as they were in the original formulation.

1.5 The present paper accordingly aims to draw from the country papers in order to:

- Establish the conceptual links between the original themes listed in 1.1 (Section 2).
- Establish the distinctions between the three levels of policies and services listed in 1.3 (Section 3).
- Address some generic issues that cross-cut the three levels of policies and services (Section 4).

It will also suggest some related questions that might form a basis for the discussion on this theme at the symposium (Section 5).

1.6 As a final introductory point, it is important to note that the status of the papers varies. Some represent individual contributions; some are team documents. Some have been based on a wider consultative process; some have not. Some include contributions from, or have been approved by, government policy-makers, and therefore have at least semi-official status; in others, this is not the case.

2. Establishing the conceptual links

2.1 **Human capital.** The theme of human capital is addressed by seven of the papers. It is defined by OECD as the knowledge, skills and competencies of the workforce. Several papers link it to human capital theory, which emphasises the importance of increasing individuals' knowledge, creativity and innovative flair as a critical means of gaining competitive economic advantage. The UK paper points out that the theory has been subject to critique, partly on the grounds that it ignores the contribution to competitiveness made by other factors, including investment, changes in work organisation, consensus-based industrial relations, and new managerial approaches. Nonetheless, it continues to be very influential on national policies in most if not all countries.

2.2 Enhancing human capital is a key policy drive in many countries – including, for example, the National Reform Agenda in Australia. In at least two country reports (Italy, South Africa) it is framed as 'human resource development'. Government is seen as having a key leadership role (e.g. Botswana). The focus tends to be on goals like increasing qualification levels, increasing participation in post-compulsory education, and increasing participation in training programmes within companies (UK). There is also a focus on enhancing the economic yield from investment in education by strengthening its links with working life (Norway).

2.3 In addition, strategies for human capital often focus on increasing levels of labour-force participation. This may have an economic purpose, in enhancing labour supply (see 2.5-2.9 below), but it may also have a social dimension, in terms of achieving a more inclusive, cohesive and equitable society. The paper on South Africa, for example, links it to the notion that development is not about delivery of goods to a passive citizenry but about active involvement and empowerment; the paper on Denmark suggests that generous welfare systems require high labour participation rates.

2.4 The Australian paper notes that the concept of human capital can be defined *narrowly* as referring to work capacities and measurable skills, or more *broadly* as including personality traits that significantly influence labour productivity. The broader concept also includes career development skills: the ability of individuals to develop, manage and deploy their knowledge, skills and competencies. Recent OECD work has underlined the importance of this broader definition.

2.5 **Labour supply.** The theme of labour supply is addressed by seven reports. In some countries, particularly those with low unemployment, concerns relate to overall labour shortages (e.g. Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand). In other cases, the focus is on more specific skill shortages. This may be framed in terms of mismatch related either to *level* (need for general upskilling) or to *field* (e.g. shortages of people qualified for particular professions or trades).

2.6 Issues relating to labour supply vary, depending on the stage and nature of economic development. They are very different, for example, in a country moving from an agro-based to an industrial economy (Botswana), from a country with a boom in 'new economy' jobs (India), or from a country seeking to diversify its economy (Oman).

2.7 Interventions aimed at enhancing labour supply are often aimed at particular target-groups. Examples mentioned in the country papers include measures designed to increase the labour-market participation of:

- Drop-outs from education.

- Sole parents / second earners / women returners.
- People with disabilities.
- Immigrants / refugees.
- Disadvantaged ethnic groups.
- Older workers (see Theme E).

2.8 These groups often require, or benefit from, interventions targeted to their distinctive needs. An example cited in the paper from New Zealand is interventions with Maori and Pacific peoples, who commonly have a different approach to the acquisition of knowledge and skills than other New Zealanders, and who benefit from a customised approach that acknowledges their cultural beliefs and values.

2.9 The link between labour supply and career development is established strongly in the papers from Australia and Ireland. The Australian paper points out that the decisions that people make about their participation in the labour market are influenced by the interaction of their own life circumstances, including their level of education and their understanding of the labour market, with the decisions and behaviours of employers, and with public policies. Career development services assist individuals to understand and manage the interaction of these forces, sometimes competing, in ways that maximise their labour-force participation.

2.10 **Employability skills.** The theme of employability skills is addressed in ten reports. 'Employability' is defined in the Latvian report as the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, it depends upon: their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess; the way they use and deploy these assets; the way they present themselves to employers; and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. This definition clearly locates career development as a core element of employability skills.

2.11 In other formulations, employability skills and career development skills are views as separate but also as potentially complementary and inter-dependent. The Australian report, for example, points out that the widely-used Employability Skills Framework describes the 13 personal attributes and 8 key skills that employers require of potential employees. This is complemented by the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (adapted from a similar Blueprint developed in Canada) which identifies 11 career self-management competencies across the life-span. The complementary nature of the two frameworks is recognised in some settings but not in others.

2.12 A further 'disconnect', noted in the report on Canada, is between career development services and the development of career development skills. It points out that government strategy documents often describe the importance of career development outcomes (e.g. changes in situation such as finding employment, or applying for further training or education; learning to search for career and labour market information; learning to identify employment and education activities), without identifying career development programmes and services as a necessary delivery mechanism to achieve these outcomes.

2.13 The report on New Zealand challenges these 'disconnects'. It affirms that improving the capacity of the learning system and of workplaces to assist in developing the employability and career self-management skills of individuals is a key way of harnessing the potential of the workforce, and therefore leading to greater productivity.

2.14 **Establishing the links.** The key issue which links these different themes is how career development services (original theme 4) can develop employability skills (original theme 3) in ways which influence the labour supply (original theme 2) so as to maximise the development and utilisation of human capital (original theme 1).

2.15 In the view of some of the country papers, these links need to be established in proactive terms that apply to the whole population rather than in reactive terms confined to limited 'deficit' groups. The Canadian report, for example, suggests that until career development is more aligned with policy issues and connected to the productivity of the working population as a whole, rather than

mainly to those in crisis or deficit skill positions, it will continue to be seen as a fringe policy instrument rather than a central instrument. Similarly, the report on Poland calls for a change in the character of services from a reactive to a proactive model.

3. Career development and three aspects of workforce development

3.1 Jacobs & Hawley¹ define workforce development as ‘the coordination of public and private sector policies and programs that provides individuals with the opportunity for a sustainable livelihood and helps organizations to achieve exemplary goals, consistent with the societal context’. They go on to state that workforce development focuses on four societal issues:

- how schools and agencies prepare individuals to enter or re-enter the workforce;
- how organisations provide learning opportunities to improve workforce performance;
- how organisations respond to changes that affect workforce effectiveness;
- how individuals undergo life transitions related to workforce participation.

3.2 For the purposes of the symposium, it is suggested (see 1.3) that the first of these be labelled ‘workforce preparation’, that the second and third be merged as ‘workforce adaptability’, and that the fourth be labelled ‘workforce reintegration’.

3.3 Theme B, then, will focus on career development for young people (workforce preparation). It will explore services, programmes and policy initiatives related to young people, including those in schools and tertiary education. It will also place career development provision in the context of wider employability agendas (design of learning pathways etc.).

3.4 Theme C will focus on career development and adults at work (workforce adaptability). It will examine employer-based services and programmes related to the career development of employees, and their relationship to wider human resource development (HRD) and training provision. It will also explore public-policy initiatives designed to encourage and support employers in this area. It will include attention to ways of making the case to employers (in terms of organisational/business benefits), the distinctive needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the role of government as an employer, and the role of sector bodies.

3.5 Theme D will focus on career development and adults re-entering work (workforce reintegration). It will explore services, programmes and policy initiatives related to unemployed people, to immigrants and refugees, and to those re-entering the labour market, plus services available to individuals (including employed individuals) in the community (education-based, community-based, private-sector). It will include attention to assessment and recognition of prior learning.

3.6 As noted in 1.4, older workers are given separate attention as Theme E. This is partly because this was addressed as a separate theme by four country papers, and partly because it cross-cuts elements of workforce adaptability and workforce reintegration.

4. Some cross-cutting issues

4.1 A number of issues cross-cut the relationship between career development and the three aspects of workforce development, in the sense that they relate to career development on a lifelong basis. Two of these are addressed in Theme F:

- Improving the evidence base: routine data collection; research studies; strategies for developing more policy-related research; strategies for disseminating research to policy-makers and/or practitioners.

¹ Jacobs, R. & Hawley, J. (in press). Emergence of workforce development: definition, conceptual boundaries, and implications. In MacLean, R. & Wilson, D. (eds.): *International Handbook of Technical and Vocational Education and Training*. Amsterdam: Kluwer.

- The professional development of the field: whether career development is a role or profession; initiatives related to staff development and quality enhancement (including those relevant to employer-based provision).
- 4.2 Two further issues, covered in several of the country papers, merit attention here:
- The need for career and labour market information.
 - The need for lifelong career development strategies, and mechanisms to develop and implement them.
- 4.3 **Career and labour market information.** The need for high-quality labour market information to underpin career development provision at all ages is widely recognised. In several countries, such information exists, but is not communicated in forms which make it accessible to the general public for use in career decision-making (see e.g. reports on Ireland, South Africa, UK). A number of initiatives are under way to address this issue.
- 4.4 Linked to this is the need for comprehensive career information systems. The development of such systems requires a strong collaborative structure. Examples include that developed for the Australian on-line system (myfuture.edu.au), and the Canada Career Consortium. An initiative to develop such a system, based on collaboration between the two main relevant government departments, is currently under way in Ireland.
- 4.5 **Lifelong career development strategies.** There is a widely-recognised need more broadly for strategic mechanisms to develop and implement lifelong career development strategies. A number of relevant initiatives are mentioned in the country papers:
- In Australia, the Career Industry Council of Australia has played an important leadership role, and a feasibility study has been conducted on the establishment of a national institute for leadership for career development.
 - In Canada, a pan-Canadian symposium has been held on career development and public policy; several provinces have subsequently developed their own strategies.
 - In Finland, national working groups have periodically been established by the two relevant ministries with a broad membership including the social partners.
 - In Ireland, the UK and some other European countries, national guidance forums are being established, with some networking support from the European Commission.
 - In Latvia, a working group has been established by the two relevant ministries to review existing legislation and clarify the respective tasks and services of different career development providers.
- 4.6 If such strategies are to include a strong focus on the relationship between career development and workforce development, it is crucial that the social partners are closely involved in these developments. The difficulties of securing employer involvement is mentioned in, for example, the papers on Canada and India.
- 4.7 Conversely, it is important that the career development field is represented in any mechanisms designed to develop national or regional strategies for workforce development (see e.g. papers on Botswana and Canada).
- 4.8 One of the goals of these various mechanisms could be to develop a career development culture. The paper on Canada suggests that ‘pockets’ of such a culture are beginning to develop, but that much more work is needed.

5. Questions for discussion

5.1 Questions arising from the country-paper contributions on this theme, as summarised above, include:

- Is the role of career development services in maximising the development and utilisation of human capital now sufficiently well-established in conceptual terms? If not, what further work is needed on this?
- Are there tensions between viewing career development in these terms and the views of it taken by career development professionals? How are these tensions to be resolved?
- What are the implications for public policy of the link between career development and human capital, in relation to the three aspects of workforce development: workforce preparation, workforce management, and workforce reintegration?
- What strategic mechanisms are needed at national (and, where appropriate, sub-national) level to promote and pursue these implications?
- How can employers be encouraged to participate in these mechanisms?

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4.4.06