

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

Synthesis of Country Papers

SESSION 8 (THEME F): CAREER DEVELOPMENT: THE EVIDENCE BASE AND PROFESSIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The theme of the evidence base was addressed directly in the papers of five countries and indirectly in the papers of a number of others. Professional infrastructure was not one of the original six themes. However, it was addressed in the papers of a number of countries.

1. The Evidence Base

1.1 The critical need for a stronger evidence base to inform and support policy decisions at national and international levels is a long established issue that was highlighted at the international symposia held in 1999 and 2001 and also by international reports such as those of the OECD and the World Bank.

1.2 Each of the five country papers provided examples of research that is contributing to an evidence base. However, none described coordinated, comprehensive national research programs.

1.3 The research projects described in the country papers highlighted the breadth of research that is possible including evaluation of services (e.g., Australia, Finland, Latvia), review of services (e.g., Ireland), assessing service and information needs (e.g., Finland, Ireland), review of performance indicators and benchmarks (e.g., UK), links between career goals and educational attainment (e.g., UK), and assessing the effectiveness of career work (e.g., New Zealand, Norway, UK). Finland described the use of a national web-based institutional evaluation tool.

1.4 The UK paper highlighted the ongoing need for research into the cost of service delivery and also the relationship between delivery costs and outcomes of delivery.

1.5 The Australian paper drew attention to the need for career development to be seen as a discrete field of research and not a subset of, for example, education or psychology.

1.6 Two country papers (Finland and the UK) described the formation of research centres to build the evidence base and to bring policy, research and practice closer together. A feasibility study conducted in Australia supported the formation of such a centre but at the time of writing, no decision had been made. These centres would have links to the ICCDPP.

1.7 In Canada, the Canadian Research Working Group on Evidence-Based Practice has the potential to lead career development research and has developed a draft framework for evaluating the effectiveness of career interventions.

1.8 The Canadian paper discussed the tension that exists between the quantitative evidence base favoured by policy makers and the qualitative approach favoured by practitioners

1.9 Dissemination of research findings to practitioners, policy makers, employers and labour organisations remains an issue of ongoing concern.

1.10 Despite the projects described in the country papers, the need to build an evidence base to support and inform policy still remains.

2. Professional Infrastructure

2.1. Professional infrastructure refers to the systems, procedures and organisations that could contribute to the development of national policies and delivery systems that facilitate lifelong access of all citizens to career development services.

2.2 Two of these elements will be discussed separately. They are:

- the professional standing of career development practice
- strategic leadership

2.3 **Elements of professional infrastructure.** There is evidence throughout the papers that professional infrastructures are being developed in several countries (e.g., Australia; Canada; Finland; Ireland; New Zealand; UK).

2.4 Elements of such infrastructures include:

- organizational structures that can provide strategic leadership (e.g., CICA in Australia; Canadian Research Working Group on Evidence-Based Practice in Canada; Professional Career Counselling State Agency, and National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance in Latvia; Career Services rapuara in New Zealand; National Guidance Policy Forum (NGPF), National Library Resource for Guidance, and National Resource Service in the UK;)
- practitioner professional standards (e.g., Australia, Canada, USA)
- quality standards for service products (e.g., Finland)
- national guidance strategy (e.g., Austria)
- career development competency frameworks (e.g., Australia; Canada)

2.5. **Professional standing of career development practice.** The professional standing of career development practice has repeatedly been raised as an issue of concern in international reports such as those of the OECD and the World Bank.

2.6 The training and qualifications of career development practitioners have received great emphasis in some countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, UK, USA) with varying degrees of implementation success. However, it still remains a concern in these and other countries (e.g., Botswana, India) where career development practitioners are few in number and career development services are less established.

2.7 A contrast that highlights the importance of national coordination and strategic leadership in the implementation of practitioner standards is evident in the Australian and Canadian examples. The implementation of standards in Australia is being coordinated at a national level through the Career Industry Council of Australia and its member associations. Standards are being phased in over a six year period and all Australian career development practitioners will meet entry level training qualifications by 2012. In Canada where there is no such national coordination, implementation of the standards is voluntary.

2.8 Through Australian Career Development Studies, Australia provides free online training opportunities to career development practitioners. These modules may articulate into career development qualifications at either the Certificate IV vocational qualification level or postgraduate certificate level. By 2012, the Certificate IV in Career Development will be the minimum qualification expected of associate career development practitioners, and postgraduate certificate or vocational graduate certificate level qualifications will be the minimum qualification expected of professional career development practitioners.

2.9 **Strategic leadership.** At a national level in all countries, strategic leadership is an important factor in moving the career development agenda forward and building alliances with stakeholders such as policy makers, employer groups, and labour organisations.

2.10 Two country papers (Australia and UK) provided examples of closer working relationships between policy makers and other stakeholders such as practitioners. In the UK, this is done through the formal mechanism of the National Guidance Policy Forum (NGPF), whereas in other countries such as Australia practitioners have been represented on steering committees for national career development projects.

2.11 Australia provides a strong example of strategic leadership by practitioners through the Career Industry Council of Australia and by policy makers such as the Department of Education Science and

Training. Such leadership has been instrumental in and critical to the development and ongoing implementation of Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. Canada is investigating the creation of a national practitioner body.

2.12 Canada described the poorly developed links between the career development sector and the business community sector. Related to this is the absence of a forum for stakeholder dialogue on career development public policy and workforce development.

2.13 Several countries describe the fragmentation of responsibility for career development services at government levels (e.g., Australia, Canada, Ireland, Italy) which may lead to duplication of services and the lack of a coordinated approach.

2.14 India provides an example where, in the absence of government policy and leadership despite the existence of a Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance, career development may be slanted towards commercial interests such as fee-paying institutes and industry with little emphasis on the career development needs of individuals.

2.15 Attention was drawn to the issue of insufficient funding for career development services (e.g., Italy) and practice and theory (e.g., USA).

2.16 Poland suggested that funding be drawn from a number of sources given its contribution to private, organisational and public policy goals. Such sources included the national budget, local government, employers, and trade union funds. They also suggested that individuals could pay for some services such as assessment of competence.

2.17 There remains a great need to build alliances with stakeholders such as practitioners, policy makers, employer groups, and labour organisations.

2.18 An example of building such alliances is provided by Norway through its national policy, Partnerships for Career Guidance, that is being implemented at a county level. Such partnerships involve county governors, employer and employee organisations, relevant public and private agencies and institutions of higher education. It is expected that such partnerships will facilitate more targeted and effective guidance programs and that job-seekers will find work more rapidly.

3. Questions for discussion

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

- What strategic mechanisms are needed at a national (and, where appropriate, sub-national) level to develop a comprehensive evidence base?
- What strategic mechanisms are needed at a national (and, where appropriate, sub-national) level to support the development of a professional infrastructure?
- What strategic mechanisms are needed to facilitate closer collaboration and dissemination of research between policy makers, practitioners, researchers, employers, labour organisations, and other stakeholders?

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