



# Conclusions of Workshop on LMI in Lifelong Guidance

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## Introduction

On 16 May, Cedefop organized a workshop in its Thessaloniki premises, on the integration of labour market information and intelligence (LMI) in lifelong guidance. The event had 22 invited participants, mostly international experts in LMI and career guidance, with published research on the topic and selected promoters of relevant projects in the EU. The workshop produced important insights regarding priorities in research and capacity development in LMI and information technologies (ICT) in European lifelong guidance (LLG) systems. The workshop proved to be a rich source of information and reflexion, with lively and engaging attendee participation. Work was organised in four sessions with the following themes:

- Ideals and realities of ICT and LMI usage in career guidance across the EU
- Key challenges in developing ICT and LMI for guidance
- Can we generalise policy responses and successful practices?
- Future action

The most important aspects focused during the workshop are resumed in the sections below.

## 1. Conclusions from debate

### 1.1. Prescribing LMI or helping people learn how to navigate it?

The participants clearly acknowledged the high value of LMI for career guidance, while recognising its limitations and the challenges its integration in career services poses. Konstantinos Pouliakas (Cedefop) made the point that LMI available through official sources can be very useful for citizens, but that it is not harmonised across EU countries, so varying levels of comprehensiveness, reliability and updatedness co-exist. He also mentioned that data reveals a clear positive correlation between LMI usage and the resource to career guidance services across the EU, which seems to support previous research, which indicates that generally LMI is only successfully used by citizens with professional guidance support.

The debate clearly highlighted that there is an enormous wealth of information available, but that it is difficult to navigate, assess and use. Tristram Hooley (iCeGS, Derby) also reflected on the limitations of official data, particularly its delay in publication and the fact that generally it only indirectly reflects labour market realities and effective job offer. He suggested that informal sources should also be integrated in the information used such as anecdotes, newspaper contents on occupations and economic activities and information taken from job boards. For this purpose virtual robots could be used to scrape relevant online information from diverse sources.

On this topic, Vladimir Kvetan (Cedefop) informed the workshop about Cedefop's current project to gather and analyse online information on vacancies. He noted that although this type of tool holds an enormous potential for the development of useful LMI in the near future, it faces important limitations. Firstly, this type of information is strictly limited by the incidence of internet advertisement of vacancies in each country. In many cases, online vacancies provide a very partial or biased picture of the labour market, focusing on specific occupations, temporary placements or any other niche. Secondly, there is a varying understanding across countries of the information which should be integrated in a vacancy post and also a varying interpretation of what a vacancy truly reflects (e.g. minimum requirements, detailed description of functions and tasks, expectation setting regarding wage). To entirely be usable this information needs to be subjected to this type of meta-analysis, which should be communicated to practitioners.

Mr Hooley also suggested that the role of practitioners should shift from being product placers of institutionally produced "matching information" to map designers (where to find what) that can encourage autonomous exploration of combined types of LMI by end users. Jenny Bimrose (IER, Warwick) underlined in her address that the step that is required for practitioners to deliver targeted intelligence, rather than simple information, is the development of a critical perspective towards available LMI. She noted that impartiality is limited by the desirability of tailoring the information and stimulating critical reasoning.

The participants unanimously defended the idea that LMI integration in both guidance and careers education must be based on a pedagogical approach. Many interventions favoured a career learning framework as a basis for the integration of LMI. Career management skills of users should be developed in a progressive way, with adequate complexity of information exploration tasks. Users should be supported in developing autonomy in identifying and using LMI relevant for the clarification of their career choices and that can allow them to act upon identified opportunities.

Mil Kooyman (Het Beroepenhuis, Belgium) provided a good illustration of how LMI can be critically and pedagogically integrated in guidance processes. He described “Het Beroepenhuis”, a project aimed at youth between 11 and 14, in which occupations are presented with a practical approach, questioning students assumptions about activities and stimulating further inquiring and exploration of available information. Sector councils information and official LMI are used to define priority occupation which might be foreseen to have recruitment difficulties. Critical reasoning about careers and autonomous exploration of information are strongly stimulated, along with self-reflexive abilities.

## **1.2. ICT holds immense potential for LMI customisation in guidance**

Susanne Kraatz (European Parliament, Policy Unit), noted that information needs have distinct motivations, following group patterns and individual specificities. Guidance services and the way information is selected and integrated in the guidance process must therefore acknowledge characteristics of client groups such as migrants, older workers or young students and diagnose individual needs. She also adverted to the potential risk of careers services having an excessively mechanistic approach to labour market mismatches since these have, equally, multiple motivations. Mismatches can be motivated by well reflected individual preferences, rather than lack of awareness about existing gaps and work contexts, in which case the information to explore must address these preferences.

Ms Bimrose noted that total individual customisation of services is at hand due to the evolution of ICT tools. Not only multiple sources of LMI can be combined in single access services, as Web 3.0 technology allows for the development of apps which are responsive to typified individual characteristics and preferences. Nick Sofroniou (IER, Warwick) exemplified this type of approach, by presenting UK’s service “LMI for All”. The service combines a wide array of information sources, including official statistics and online job postings, boasting local level information on travel times, vacancies and wages, to better serve individual needs. It offers open source data access that allows users/organisation to customise their interfaces according to their preferences and needs. The level and type of uptake by professional careers services is still under evaluation.

Another strategy for user customisation was presented by Elsebeth Nygaard (eGuidance, Denmark), who presented the Danish eGuidance service. In this case, the tailored service is achieved by multichannel delivery, based on a progressive assessment of the users’ needs. The service offers an information website, with access to online counselling via chat, telephone counselling and the possibility to have face-to-face meetings, when necessary. Clients’ needs are assessed from first contact and the service is progressively adapted, suggesting distinct combinations of delivery methods and information resources, depending on the initial

assessment and the development of the individual within the process. Looking at these two examples, it is easy to conceive of near-future careers services as open source LMI, with adaptive professional support.

### **1.3. ICT usage requires skilled, motivated professionals**

Professional support is generally needed for users to fully explore the potential of LMI. Given that much of the relevant information is available online or in some type of digital support, practitioners must successfully use ICT tools to the benefit of the user, rendering a more effective service. In general this raises challenges, since practitioners may have limitations as ICT users (particularly older age cohorts) and may also have difficulties in embedding work methods and strategies with digital technologies. Jaana Ketunen (IEE, Jyvaskyla) delivered a structured reflection on this topic, highlighting changing requirements and challenges according to roles developed by guidance professionals.

When informing, practitioners will need to identify and sort available information. They will require media literacy and will need to have an operational knowledge of ICT tools. Structured career support will require proficiency in diverse online contents, the ability to motivate and support individuals in information processing and the capacity to use ICT for one-on-one communication. When in a careers education setting, pedagogic orientation and focus on career management skills development become central, and so does the ability to use interactive and multimedia contents. A more systematic practice based on a user-centred approach, in its turn, requires a well-planned service that can enable individuals to use synchronous and asynchronous communication. In this case professionals will need to be proficient in the usage of online tools, but, to a large extent, the quality of the service will be defined at management level, through clear planning, monitoring and strategic development. Support to practitioner networking that allows for exchange of experiences among peers can play an important role.

The limitations on the role of the practitioner in assuring successful integration of LMI and effective usage of ICT were also mentioned by Ms Bimrose. While practitioners can develop critical approaches towards usage of LMI, develop positive attitudes towards and improve ICT skills, they should not carry the full responsibility for service quality. Many of the issues which determine the success of ICT and LMI usage in guidance belong to an organisational and systemic level. To illustrate these points Pedro Moreno da Fonseca (Cedefop) mentioned the results of the Cedefop's recent consultation (03.2016) to a representative sample of Member States concerning development priorities in ICT and LMI. Out of 12 priorities expressed by the member States, 8 were related to aspects normally decided at system level (e.g. ministry, inter-ministerial, parliamentary).

#### 1.4. A consistent policy framework and stakeholder participation are preconditions for success

A favourable policy framework is fundamental in achieving good LMI integration and good ICT usage in guidance. Several participants highlighted that consistent use of LMI and ICT tools across services and adequate practitioner skills' development only emerge with consistent policy frameworks and informed management. Raimo Vuorinen (ELGPN) noted that policy generates the conditions for good practice, by allocating resources, regulating practice, organising delivery, assuring professionalism and the training of practitioners, harmonising information and by coordinating diverse sectors and stakeholders. He mentioned the important work developed by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) in exchanging good policy practices and the common work developed by the Member States in agreeing a set of guidelines for guidance system development.

Within the guidelines, the ones dedicated to quality in careers information and ICT usage were of special interest for the discussion. Important aspects focused by the guidelines include, were emphasised:

- The information provided must be designed to respond to users' needs and understandable;
- LMI must be reliable, be gathered and distributed within a logic of stakeholder cooperation
- Information should reflect also local job markets and training offer
- Forecasting data should be used
- Both experiential and non-experiential forms of translating information should be used
- Promote career learning/CMS development is fundamental for adequate usage of LMI
- Use of diversified media should be promoted in delivery
- EU tools should be further explored

Beyond its regulatory role, policy level also holds the potential of enabling stakeholder cooperation in the gathering of information, production of intelligence and its delivery. This process becomes particularly important in the production of local and sector specific intelligence that reflects the reality of occupational practice and actual vacancies. Cooperation with employers tends to be fundamental to understand diversified contexts and skills needs. Sector councils and structured expert consultation were mentioned in diverse occasions as appropriate means to complement official statistics. Sector councils (or similar bodies) can accommodate social partners' representatives, occupational and civil association, among others.

Strong political initiative and commitment can help bring upon generalised innovation at an accelerated rate, as the Danish case documented. The clear planning, focus and goal setting of e-Guidance allowed for adequate resource allocation, setting of explicit targets to be achieved by services, effective monitoring and transparent regulation of practice. The end result was an innovative, national level service, with undeniable results and which operated as vehicle for a modernisation in career guidance practice.

### **The conclusions were consistent with Cedefop's study results**

The results from Cedefop's study on "LMI in lifelong guidance" were also presented during the meeting and there was strong consistency between them and the views expressed by the participants. In brief:

- LMI should be well integrated in a career learning process that promotes the development of reflexive career identities and autonomous exploration of career information;
- Coordination and co-operation among the different ministerial departments and stakeholders involved in production and delivery of career information is vital.
- Quality and provision of LMI should be addressed in the national policy strategies for lifelong guidance and career education at school and monitored by the responsible institution(s).
- Future studies on the progress and implementation of lifelong guidance strategies in Europe should include LMI integration into guidance.
- Systematic assessment of policies and practices which aim at improving the use of LMI in career decision is necessary.
- Well-targeted single access points should be established to operate as virtual one-stop shops, adaptable to different client group's needs.
- The design and usage of digital and web based tools must account for the existence of different levels of information and communication technology (ICT) competence across the population.
- Online instruments are more effective when combined with other delivery methods. Their use must be adapted to users' needs and career learning activities.
- Online tools and instruments, such as CV building, edutainment, job exploration, self-assessment, social media, should be developed, sustained and regularly updated by a professional careers service.
- LMI should be impartial, to avoid biased vocational choices.
- Providing long-distance on-line tools for career advice does not substitute or dispense the intervention qualified career guidance practitioners.
- LMI provision will only be effective if people have learned to identify opportunities in the information provided. Career management skills development (CMS) should start at a relatively early-stage.
- LMI is well assimilated and particularly useful as part of practice oriented career learning activities.
- The development and engagement of Sector Councils or analogous bodies is a powerful way to gather and transmit up-to-date information on the reality of occupations and production, as well as ongoing skills needs.
- The provision of quality labour market forecasts for the different economic sectors in the economy increases the quality of LMI. Forecasts should be combined with occupational and contextual information
- Highly updated job vacancies information (or real-time) are useful, but should be used in combination with statistical data published by public sources.

More detailed information on the study will be available on Cedefop's website.

## 2. Toolkits discussion

The last session of the workshop was dedicated to discuss the toolkits blueprints which produced in the context of Cedefop's study "LMI in Lifelong Guidance". The toolkits consist on sets of resources for end-users and practitioners, including: tips on how to better integrate LMI in career guidance/self-help activities and use ICT tools; training resources; and a central access point to European and national-based tools. The blueprints were developed with a general character and with the aim to provide a departure point for reflexion and future work.

The blueprints structure and text were made available to the participants ahead of the meeting for analysis and comment. Participants were requested written feedback, which was synthetized and used to structure the session. The main points emerging from the written feedback were the following:

- Should there be one or two toolkits? Implementing a single set of resources for practitioners may prove to be the most rational and feasible option.
- What level of LMI skill should be required of the toolkit users?
- Should the kits exemplify how to assess reliability and accuracy of available data?
- Toolkits should help identify what is useful and provide indications on dealing with distinct labour market scenarios and unexpected situations.
- Toolkits should reflect a theoretical approach, which can help practitioners develop perspectives and have a pedagogical orientation.
- Toolkits should be careful on expectations set for the practitioners' role, since many aspects of LMI integration in guidance can transcend practice level.

The discussion of these points allowed for further clarification of scope and development approach of the toolkits and provided additional ideas.

Although the notion of a separate set of resources for end users generated sympathy, most participants defended that a toolkit aimed at practitioners only would be more feasible and less complex. It was considered that the complexity generated by the diversity of client groups, contexts and variable individual requirements could be a hampering factor for successful tool development. If targeted to practitioners only, its focus should be clear and sharpened. It was suggested that the toolkits would have variations according to context of usage, clearly stating its target and mode of utilisation. To the extent these would be online resources, it was suggested that similar contents could be made available with several different interfaces, adjusted to context of practice (e.g. curricular activities in schools; work with unemployed in employment services; migrants). It was also suggested that within tips provided, the kits could also address aspects of the EU Skills Panorama usage.

It was discussed that most practitioners will have relatively low skills in accessing and analysing LMI and that the tools should depart from that assumption. To the extent training modules would be provided, they should aim at explicit learning outcomes and desirable levels of skill in LMI related tasks. It was further suggested that the kits could act as a normative reference regarding the professional profile of practitioners. The kits can provide a clear reference on

desirable ICT and LMI skills, complementing Cedefop's 2009 profile and building upon both the more recent NICE and the Commission's PES advisers profiles. The toolkits would then act as a support tool to help MS harmonise their practitioners' profile, according to the EU reference. The toolkit(s) would then serve as a means to professionalization, besides being a set of resources. It was also suggested that the resource bundle and the professionalization reference should be contextualised within a clear and shared policy framework. The guidelines agreed by the MS would provide an ideal setting, granting also a rationale for multisector application of the tool.

In terms of content it was suggested that the kits should emphasise more the client side and refine the provider approach. Clients' career management skill development should be emphasised, with clear depiction of activities and expected learning outcomes. Practitioners should be supported in developing a critical approach towards the usage of LMI. A practical oriented reflection/matrix on the multiple approaches to LMI usage depicted by different career development theories, and the potential consequences of their application could be of great use for practitioners.

It was also suggested that that this type of resources would need very clear referencing of sources being used and very clear explanation regarding the use of each referenced media. Some participants also defend the idea of an open source tool, which could be easily integrated in adopting countries' systems.

### **Closing remarks**

The debate provided precious information and reflection material for Cedefop to develop support tools for development of capacity in ICT and LMI in careers services. The high quality of the discussion and the richness of the results directly reflected the experience, insight and availability of the experts who contributed to the workshop. The high consistency of the conclusions and the content of the debates with Cedefop's study results, heralds the relevance of the forthcoming publication for the policy debate in the area. This workshop sets the pace for a continuous cooperation work between Cedefop, the research community and the MS, which should impact on the quality of common learning to be achieved. It also sets a reference for future debates on the issue of LMI integration in services aimed at citizens, by successfully merging best practice in LMI production and analysis, with best practice in guidance and careers education.