



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture  
Vocational training  
**Development of vocational training policy**

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**FOR THE INFORMAL MEETING OF MINISTERS FOR EDUCATION  
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**GUIDANCE AND LIFELONG LEARNING - FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

**Minister Dempsey,**

**Dear Colleagues**

It is a great pleasure to be invited to address you today on the subject of lifelong guidance – directions for the future.

**1. Background: the new economic and social challenges facing Europe**

The theme is very pertinent to the new reality of the knowledge based society in Europe.

Knowledge, as we know, is a source of economic wealth as well as a source of personal employability, competence, well being and personal wealth.

We are exposed to more and more knowledge and information on every aspect of life.

Paradoxically knowledge and competence increasingly have more limited duration and value, resulting in a continuous need for learning over one's lifetime across the many spheres of one's life.

Education and training policies are central to the creation and transmission of knowledge and are a determining factor in each society's potential for innovation.

Accompanying this major societal change are the new social and economic contexts of work and employment.

Fifty years ago the model of work that faced our grandparents or parents favoured long term career planning in a local and regional labour markets.

The current economic climate, characterised by instability, rapid change, and mobility of jobs globally, requires competence in short-term career planning within national, European and global labour markets.

Such career planning must take account of continuous movement between participation in education, training, employment and periods of unemployment.

Governments and social partners have accepted the need for lifelong and life-wide learning to sustain employability, economic development, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship.

However this is not yet reflected in the way learning opportunities in education and training are organised.

While governments must reform their systems, citizens have prime responsibility for their own career development

- as active agents in managing their learning and careers and
- in developing and marketing their competences over their lifetime.

## **2. Major challenges facing guidance services in Europe**

Yesterday you were presented with the results of studies of policies for career guidance in the Member States and future Member States undertaken recently by CEDEFOP and ETF on behalf of the European Commission, and by the OECD.

These studies show that existing policies, systems and practices for guidance in many countries have not kept pace with the new social and economic reality and the demands of the knowledge society.

Policies for career guidance within education, training and employment sectors do not support a lifelong learning approach in a coordinated, coherent and consistent manner.

Systems tend to operate in isolation in service delivery and information sharing

The tradition that the State is the only stakeholder in policy and systems development in the field of guidance still predominates. There is little other stakeholder involvement.

Practices depend on the training provided (if provided at all!) to guidance practitioners.

The training of many guidance practitioners does not include new ways of working particularly with respect to

- Competence in Information and Communications Technologies
- Europe as the reference field for career guidance information.

In brief, existing guidance provision in many countries

- does not reflect the lifelong learning approach,
- is not well prepared for the new social and economic context in which European citizens live, and
- is not adequately developed for the attainment of the Lisbon 2010 goals of economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

### **3. European Level Responses**

At European level a number of steps have been taken to promote the changes that are required:

- Member States have begun to adapt their education and training systems to the challenges of the knowledge based economy and society; this work is supported at European level by the Education and Training 2010 work programme.
- The recent progress report on this work programme, *the Joint Interim Report of the Council of Education Ministers and the Commission to the European Council*, called for:
  - the strengthening of the role, quality and co-ordination of information and guidance services so that they support learning at all ages and in a range of settings, and

- the empowerment of citizens to manage their learning and work.
- The Report also drew attention to:
  - the need to improve awareness among disadvantaged groups of the benefits of education and training and,
  - for early intervention to support their learning.

I believe that guidance has a key role in supporting social inclusion policies.

- The Report underlined the need to speed up the pace of reforms if Member States are to meet the common objectives set for education and training by 2010.
- The implementation in all Member States of coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies is deemed to be a key lever of these reforms.
  - It would be desirable if such strategies were in place by 2006.
- The Report highlighted the value of developing common European references and principles to support national policy development.
  - I am happy to note that progress has already been made in developing such principles for guidance provision with the European citizen at the centre of such principles.
  - This development work was undertaken by one of the Objectives Groups, supported by the Commission’s own Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance.
- The Commission’s Expert Group was established to support new directions for guidance in the context of the reform of the education and training systems.
  - The Expert Group consists of a broad range of stakeholders: ministry officials of education and labour ministries, social partners, international organisations such as OECD, and non-governmental stakeholders such as European parents, European youth, European consumers.
  - I am pleased that four of the presenters at this Conference are members of the Expert Group.

- The Expert Group together with Commission and OECD staff have combined their expertise to develop a handbook for policymakers on policies for career guidance.
  - This handbook is intended to support the work of policymakers at national level to develop lifelong guidance policies and systems.
  - The handbook will be jointly published by the Commission and OECD in Autumn of this year in four languages.
- At a European programme level, Joint Actions between the SOCRATES, LEONARDO and YOUTH programmes are providing support to Member States to develop European networks of national forums for guidance.
  - These networks are intended to give policymakers and stakeholders in Europe the opportunity of working together to develop common solutions to the current and future challenges that career guidance faces.

#### **4. The major contribution of the Irish Minister Dempsey and Irish ministry of Education and Science**

In conclusion, Minister Dempsey, I would like to compliment the Irish Presidency on its initiative in organising this meeting of ministers to address the common challenges facing all of us.

- I note that the Irish Ministry of Education and Science itself has in the past three years made a significant investment:
  - in developing a national adult educational guidance service;
  - in launching several initiatives to improve guidance in second level education;
 and that it is
  - currently promoting the development of wider stakeholder involvement in policy and systems development through the establishment of a national forum for guidance.

- I warmly welcome the fact that the Irish Presidency will be proposing a Council Resolution on Lifelong Guidance at next month's meeting of Ministers, the first such Resolution considered by the Council.
- This Resolution along with the outcomes of this Conference will give direction to the work of the Member States, the European Commission and the other relevant actors, including the Social Partners, at national and European levels over the next number of years.
- The challenge for all of us here today - and with the 2010 Lisbon goal in mind - is how to work together, given the diversity of our systems, to improve the quality of lifelong guidance provision for all European citizens so that it will have a real impact.

## **5. Final wish**

I wish you all successful deliberations at today's meeting and look forward to hearing the outcomes of your discussions.