

GUIDANCE AND LIFELONG LEARNING – FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Adult Guidance Policies Millar MacDonald Department for Education and Skills, England

Good morning Ministers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

Thanks to my Irish colleagues for the invitation to address you on adult guidance policies and lifelong learning. During the next 15 minutes I hope to give you a flavour of why I think adult guidance policies are important and some examples of UK practice.

In March 2000 the European Council set out its aspiration for the European Union to become (I quote) *“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based society in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”*.

A hugely ambitious goal, and one that we can and should achieve. The Skills Strategy [slide] we published in England last July will make a significant contribution and ensure we play our part in helping to achieve that goal. That strategy recognises that skills acquisition through lifelong learning and access to information, guidance and counselling are key to the achievement of that goal. Let me set out briefly the reasons why.

Lifelong learning helps people to raise their aspirations, broaden their understanding and realise their potential. It should value and build on the learner's experience and should be accessible to all. Too often people are excluded from lifelong learning, and too often they are the very people who need it most. Disadvantaged groups, such as people with low levels of literacy or qualifications, older workers, groups living in disadvantaged areas, and people with learning difficulties or with disabilities, are often unacquainted with the opportunities that exist to acquire and develop skills through lifelong learning.

The global economy has largely made extinct the notion of a "job for life". The emphasis now is on employability and adaptability. People need access to lifelong learning to ensure they have the core skills needed to remain employable. In addition, they need access to lifelong learning to help them keep pace with the fast changing skills needs of a dynamic economy. Learning provision must respond to the present and future skill needs of the economy. Employers must play a full and active role in shaping the provision of lifelong learning. Individual citizens must have access to information, guidance and counselling to help them make choices about learning and work which balance their own needs, with those of the economy.

In England, as part of the Skills Strategy, we recently published a National Policy Framework for Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults [*slide*]. This firmly establishes guidance services as pivotal to the promotion of lifelong learning and skills acquisition, overcoming the barriers to lifelong learning, and supporting people in making realistic and well informed choices about learning and work. The National Policy Framework puts the individual citizen's needs at the heart of service delivery. It defines the services they are entitled to expect and the standards to which they will be delivered.

Our **matrix** national quality standard for information, advice and guidance services [*slide*] is used by both publicly and privately funded services. It sets

the standard for the management and delivery of guidance services. The Standard provides a guarantee of highest quality to citizens accessing guidance services.

However, it is important to recognise that guidance has an important role which includes but goes beyond individual decision making. The recent OECD study identified 3 main policy roles for careers guidance.

- *Lifelong Learning*

Career guidance and counselling underpin effective and efficient lifelong learning policies. Too often people have inaccurate expectations about learning. These may range from inaccurate expectations about the course content and style of delivery, through to unrealistic expectations about their needs for time, money and other support to complete the course. In such cases there is a high risk that individuals will “lose faith” in the learning and either drop out or fail to achieve their full potential. The implications can be far reaching since the individual learner may well be put off further learning for life!

Guidance and counselling can help to offset inefficiency by providing access for prospective learners to accurate and comprehensive information about the opportunities and their relevance in the labour market. Guidance can help to develop greater self awareness in the individual so that immediate choices are relevant to longer term career and other ambitions. Guidance services can advocate on behalf of the individual to secure learning which meets their needs. Finally, guidance services should be there to support the learner through to completion and progression to the next stage of development.

- *Labour Market*

Guidance services play an important part in labour market policies by acting as an interface between the supply and demand for skills. Guidance services

should have access to information about labour market needs across the EU, and at national, regional and local levels. In England, we are working through the Employer Training Programme and through Union Learning representatives to strengthen guidance services in the workplace. We are establishing employer-led Sector Skills Councils across the UK that will provide information, advice and guidance to individuals about the needs of their sector. *skillsformedia* is a sector specific guidance service for media and broadcasting industry which complements those services provided by the publicly funded guidance services.

We have also developed a simple and user- friendly single point of access to labour market information and intelligence across the UK. This will help guidance practitioners to support individuals in making better informed job, learning and career choices. It is available through Worktrain, our national jobs and learning web site.

- *Social Equity*

The scope for guidance and counselling to help create a fairer and more inclusive Europe is enormous. In 2002, almost 20% of young people aged 18-24 in the EU had prematurely dropped out of school and were on the fringes of the knowledge society. This is just one illustration of the social inequality across Europe. Ministers of Education have agreed on a target to bring this rate down to 10% by 2010, but this will not happen without a significant change in attitudes and practices.

Careers Scotland [slide] the national Scottish all-age guidance service targets services to those most in need of support. In Northern Ireland [slide], a new initiative in the four most economically and socially deprived areas is targeting services on re-engaging disaffected young people. The English Connexions Service [slide] has had real success by providing targeted support through Personal Advisers to young people not in education, employment or training.

Guidance and counselling services have a major role to play in helping to reduce discrimination in the labour market by promoting equal opportunities for all in learning and in the workplace. They should challenge self and socially imposed stereotypes, so that everyone may realise their full potential. And, by working collaboratively with other agencies to address multiple disadvantage, they can play an important role in linking the development of local employment opportunities and the local labour supply.

An example of this was a project in Liverpool (England) for refugees and asylum seekers. It aimed to give clear guidance on the relevant education, training and employment opportunities available across the city. Many of the clients were highly qualified but needed experience to convert their qualifications for use in Britain. One example of this involved offering clients a course in advisory work, with a special focus on advising the asylum seeker and refugee community, delivered in partnership with a Citizens Advice Bureau.

As well as challenging and preventing discrimination, guidance and counselling are closely involved in reintegrating those who have become marginalised or feel excluded from mainstream society. They work to counter disillusionment and fear of failure. Guidance and counselling can do this by strengthening individuals' self belief and self confidence, by demonstrating the relevance of learning to working life and by advocating for individuals who may be discriminated against, or who are otherwise unable to gain entry to opportunities within their capacities.

A ground-breaking project in England is working to re-integrate citizens living with HIV and Aids into learning and work through provision of high quality guidance services.

The New Deal for Skills just announced by the Government will provide a guarantee of access to skills counselling for unemployed people claiming benefits to help them improve their employability and get back into learning or

work.

So what are the challenges for improving lifelong access to guidance and counselling across Europe? Let me offer some suggestions:

- We need to ensure that guidance services are visible, accessible and have the capacity to meet the diverse range of client needs.
- We must pay particular attention at key transition points so that people have the support they need to progress both in learning and in the labour market.
- We should ensure that people can access the level of guidance they need, to the highest standards, at times and in ways that are convenient for them. In particular, we should harness technology to improve access to information and self help. Our *learndirect* helpline and web-based service and Careers Wales online [*slide*] are leading the way in this.
- We should develop career management and development skills through learning so that people can become more self-reliant and empowered to access and use information effectively to make decisions and to plan their careers.
- We must ensure access to comprehensive and integrated educational, occupational and labour market information and intelligence, in recognition of the role of guidance in individual decision-making, in encouraging mobility and in the wider needs of the economy.

I have had the opportunity to work with colleagues across the EU on the Lifelong Guidance Expert Group which is supporting the goal to improve VET by 2010. I am grateful for the opportunity to put forward the contribution of adult guidance in helping to achieve a more competitive Europe. Thank you.

Questions for discussion:

- 1) How can we ensure that guidance services are visible, accessible and

have the capacity to meet the diverse range of the needs of citizens across Europe?

2) How can we ensure access to comprehensive and integrated educational, occupational and labour market information to support mobility and in recognition of the role of guidance in individual decision-making and the wider needs of the economy?

3) How can we raise the quality, coherence and consistency of guidance provision taking account of the diverse approaches in member states?

Presentation worldwide web references:

- National Policy Framework - www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/iag
- **matrix** Standard – www.matrix-quality-standard.com
- skillsformedia - www.skillsformedia.com
- Worktrain – www.worktrain.gov.uk
- Careers Scotland – www.careers-scotland.org.uk
- Department for Employment & Learning, Northern Ireland – www.delni.gov.uk
- Connexions Service – www.connexions.gov.uk
- learndirect helpline IA Service – www.learndirect.co.uk
- Careers Wales – www.careerswales.com

Millar MacDonald
Department for Education and Skills
Engaging Adults in Learning Unit
Adult Guidance Policy
N9, Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
England, UK

T: 0044 114 259 4315
F: 0044 114 259 1067
e: Millar.MacDonald@dfes.gsi.gov.uk