Indicators and benchmarks in career guidance

Tender based on restricted invitation to tender by CEDEFOP
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Study on indicators and benchmarks in guidance

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1. Context

The European Commission considers career guidance one of the crucial elements for achieving the 4 public policy goals related to the Lisbon Strategy: lifelong learning, social inclusion, labour market efficiency, and economic development. Career guidance is also considered as one of the key levers for open, attractive and accessible learning environments, and for supporting learning at all ages and in a range of settings, empowering citizens to manage their learning and work. The Commission therefore sees effective information, guidance and counselling services as important factors in achieving these goals. It therefore calls for the strengthening of the role, quality and co-ordination of these services. The development of common European references and principles to support national policies, systems and practices for career guidance is a priority. Figure 1 gives an overview of these relationships.

![Figure 1: Means and ends of career guidance]

2. Aim of the study

As stated in Annex 2 of the invitation to the tender, the invitation is issued in the above clarified context of the political priority attached to career guidance. This Annex states the following aims of this study:

- to provide information about indicators and benchmarks in career guidance already in use, or planned by member states and in some other countries (e.g. USA, Canada);
- to examine the feasibility of various options for future action at European level.

In order to achieve these aims we propose a study that consists of two parts: a) an analytical part and b) a recommendations part. For the analytical part we propose to use a combined model,
based on an input-process-output-context model and a multi-layered model for educational policy making. The logic behind this will be explained in the next sections.

3. Types of indicators and benchmarks

As stated in the Technical Specifications of the invitation to tender, the Commission’s Expert Group on Career Guidance stresses the importance of further reflection on indicators and benchmarks to develop a deeper understanding of the basic concepts and underlying principles for guidance. Therefore, much more information is needed, hence the need for indicators and benchmarks. Various efforts have already been made to gain more insight into this matter (OECD, 2004; Henderson et al. 2004; Bysshe, Hughes & Bowes, 2002; Gilly & Gilly Eisenhower, 2003). These efforts have led to the conclusion that a number of constraints are faced when carrying out the study, for example: no commonly accepted definition of guidance exists and interpretations of what guidance means differ widely, for example, with respect to the questions who provides it and where it is provided. There are also methodological difficulties in identifying the specific impact and contribution of career guidance since it is very difficult to isolate it from other factors and as such to show causality.

The methodology of this study should therefore avoid naïve models and simple lines of reasoning connecting the provision of guidance to outputs (like unemployment rates), should take into account complex means-ends relationships, contrasting views on goals and meanings of career guidance leading to different, or even conflicting relationships between indicators and it should benefit from attempts to lift the discussion to a meta-level (cf. Henderson et al. 2004).

In the debate on career guidance various aspects are mentioned:
- Target groups, e.g. unemployed, students at various levels of education, women who want to take up work at a later age, etc.;
- Aims of career guidance, mainly related to these target groups, like: finding a job, finding the field of study and work that suits a student's needs, finding a better or more suitable job, etc.;
- Types of provisions like information, experiential learning periods in practice, reflection on careers, etc.;
- The quality of provisions, in absolute terms (good or bad) and in relative terms (suiting the needs of the target groups or not);
- Outputs, outcomes and impacts of career guidance:
  - At various levels:
    - the individual level: e.g. finding a job; understanding that one’s current job in fact suits best; finding a better job, etc.,
    - the national level: e.g. the decrease of unemployment rates, an improved balance in economic supply and demand in economically important areas like ICT or commercial services, economic growth, participation in education, general educational level, number of people having gained a basic qualification level, etc.;
  - Over various periods of time

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1 In the Netherlands for instance at least one of the debates concerning career guidance is centred around the contrast between providing information to students and adults on the one hand and on the other hand organising practical experience for students or making use of this experience in adults (see for instance Meijers & Wijers, 1997; Den Boer et al., 2003). The debate centres around the question of the usefulness of broad information on paper, or in a database versus the need for experience in practice plus thorough reflection as a basis for the crucial choices, i.e. career choices.
- immediately
- over an intermediate period of time
- long term effects;
- Financial means for career guidance provisions;
- Political views and strategies on life long learning and life long guidance;
- The relationships between these aspects.

In this study an input–throughput or process–output–context model will be used to obtain an overview of the indicators and benchmarks on the various aspects mentioned above, and the relationship between them. The research on the effectiveness of education systems is the best known type of research that uses this model (see for instance Scheerens, 1990). We consider this model applicable to the problem at hand, also because lifelong guidance can be seen as a subsystem of life long education. We will explain this in the next paragraph.

Indicator sets are expected to reveal aspects of the quality and effectiveness of systems, education systems, and career guidance systems as well. In their turn perspectives on quality can be clarified on the basis of a conceptual framework that describes these systems. The most frequently used way to do this is to depict the system, e.g. education or in this case guidance, as a productive system, in which inputs are transformed into outcomes. Steps in elaborating this basic scheme consist of:

a) including a context dimension, that functions as a source of inputs and constraints but also as a generator of the required outputs that should be produced;
b) differentiating outcomes in direct outputs, longer term outcomes, and the ultimate societal impact;
c) recognising the hierarchical nature of conditions and processes, putting public education down as an example of “multi-level governance”.

It is our intention to use this basic framework to categorise and generate indicators on career guidance. In this we would specifically take into consideration point c) mentioned in the above and at least discern indicator formulations at national system and at the institutional/organisational level of service provisions. Figure 2 shows this framework.

![Figure 2: A basic systems model on the functioning of guidance](image-url)
In career guidance systems target groups can be considered as inputs; aims and types of provisions of guidance can be seen as processes; outcomes and impacts as outputs, and financial means and political views as contexts. The different views on the goals and meanings of career guidance are mirrored in the descriptions of and relations between the inputs (target groups), processes (provisions), expected outcomes and contexts in which these are embedded. This point is further elaborated in the next section, where a multi-layered conception of educational decision-making is presented.

4. Layers in the debate

The complexity of the debate demands an approach that takes into account the various levels at which the debate is being held. The wish to gain a deeper understanding of basic concepts for and underlying principles of career guidance can be seen as a wish to learn more about it. We therefore use the model of single and double loop learning and meta cognition (Argyris & Schön, 1978). This model shows clear connections with a multi-layered model of decision making in educational policy, developed by Geerligs and Nieuwenhuis (2000). We will describe these models and explain the way in which they will be used in this study.

Single loop learning concerns everyday practice. Here, the main concern is the use of existing means for providing the services needed to attain specific ends, and the improvement of this process. The main question at this level is: do we use our means properly to attain our ends? Most of the aspects of the quality of career guidance, mentioned above, are situated at this level. Quality control systems handle these issues. Double loop learning takes place at a higher level. It concerns the correct use of means. The main question here is: do we use the right means to achieve what we aim for? Are the provided services appropriate for this target group and/or for achieving these goals? This typically concerns the type of question that is being asked in evaluating quality controls or quality control systems, like this has been done in the OECD/Cedefop/World Bank study that resulted in meta-indicators (see Henderson et al. 2004). Meta cognition – or triple loop learning, in analogy of single and double loop learning – concerns goals. It is situated at a policy level. The corresponding question is: do we aim at the right goals when using career guidance provisions? Here the means-ends debate takes place, and the relationships between the used indicators are crucial: can we expect better economic achievement due to more or improved career guidance, or is career guidance the right instrument to attain the Lisbon goals?

This line of reasoning relates to the multi-layered model for political decision making developed by Geerligs & Nieuwenhuis (2000). Figure 3 shows this model.
Geerligs & Nieuwenhuis discern:
- The primary process, i.e. the process of career guidance.
- The level of managing the primary process; at this level (or between this level and the primary process) single loop learning takes place: how can we improve our outputs using the means that we have for the target groups that we aim at?
- The institutional level\(^2\) at which the distribution of means is organised (e.g. boards of education, trade unions and employers organisations, etc.) – here learning concerns the means that are being used to attain certain goals. A typical questions here is: are the outputs worth the money we spend on them?
- The conceptual (or policy) level at which the goals are being set.

The means-ends debate is different at each of these levels of decision making and learning. When giving an overview of the indicators and benchmarks that are being used, and when producing recommendations about the ones that should be used in career guidance, this should be taken into account. The central criterion in evaluating these indicators and benchmarks shall be the consistency and coherence within each layer and between the layers of decision making. It will be like playing three dimensional chess: the study shall both give an overview of the indicators and benchmarks that are being used at each level, and of their mutual relationships; and it will describe the relationships of each of these between the various levels.

\(^2\) ‘Institutional’ should be interpreted in a socio-economic way: the set of agreements that are made in society about how certain things are done and the set of implicit understandings about how things are done in general (see e.g. Edquist & Johnson, 1997).
5. Indicators and benchmarks

In this study the following working definition of *indicators* will be used:

“Indicators are statistics that allow for value judgements to be made about key aspects of the functioning of systems, in this case the guidance system. To emphasise their evaluative nature, the term "performance indicator" is frequently used.

Included in this definition of indicators are:
- the notion that we are dealing with measurable characteristics of these systems;
- the aspiration to measure "key aspects", be it only to provide an "at a glance profile of current conditions" (Nuttall, 1989) rather than an in-depth description;
- the requirement that indicators show something of the quality of the provision, which implies that indicators are statistics that have a reference point (or standard) against which value-judgements can be made.” (Scheerens, 1990).

*Benchmarks* emphasise the comparative application of standards and indicators. An indicator could be seen as a standard when the evaluative interpretation is underlined and formalised by including a specific *norm* that marks the threshold between, for example, satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance.

The terms standards and benchmarks are also used in a more “loose” sense. In an earlier EU report on sixteen quality indicators, the following is said about benchmarks:

“It is through graphical portrayal of similarities and differences between countries that indicators and benchmarks truly come into their own. This allows countries to learn form one another through comparison of both common interests and shared differences. The aim of benchmarks is not to set standards or targets, but rather to provide policy makers with reference points. Benchmarks are used to identify issues which need to be investigated further, and to suggest alternative routes to policy goals” (EU, 2000, 3).

In this study the bulk of the work will be the identification of indicators on career guidance, in the second part recommendations will also be made on how certain indicators could be considered as benchmarks for international comparison.

6. Design of the study

Given the considerable amount of work that has been done in the area, the main focus of the study will be on collecting and integrating the existing literature on both national and European studies on career guidance, the quality of these services, the indicators and benchmarks that are used for descriptive and evaluative purposes, and good practices of each of these.

Therefore, firstly literature will be collected from the Commission’s Expert Group, the OECD, Cedefop, ETF, Objectives Groups G and H of the Concrete Objectives for Education and Training in Europe, the UK Centre for Guidance Studies, America’ s Career Resource Network Association and the Dutch Association for Career Guidance, the LDC.

Secondly, national career guidance bodies in all current and future EU-member states will be asked to send in their most relevant literature on the above mentioned topics.

Moreover, leading European bodies in the field of research will be interviewed. In any case we will consult the Commission’s Expert Group on Career Guidance, experts in OECD, Cedefop and ETF, and the Standing Group on Indicators. In addition, some of the national bodies will be interviewed. We will restrict these interviews to those national bodies that are leading in the field, according to spokespeople in the EU, up to a maximum of three. Beforehand the UK and the
Netherlands appear to be the most interesting countries for this (see Appendix 2 of the invitation to tender).

7. Workplan / time schedule

The study is divided into two parts, 1) an analytical and 2) a recommendations part. The analytical part will be conducted in August and September 2004; the recommendations part will be conducted in October 2004.

An interim report will be available by the end of August 2004; the final report will be available by the end of October 2004.

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8. Deliverables: Proposed outline of the report

Chapter 1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework includes two parts: 1) an inventory of coherent models on the relationships between provisions, target groups and outcomes of career guidance, and 2) a conceptual framework for categorising educational indicators. The conceptual framework will be based on an input-process-outcome-context model of educational systems and a multi-layered model for decision making in educational policy.

This general framework will be used to categorise indicators in career guidance, where “targets” are included as desired outcome indicators, and relevant inputs and processes to guidance are included as input and process indicators. Environmental constraints can be included as context indicators. The framework will comprise various levels of the education system, the national context, the education and training system at national level, and the level of organisations that provide education and training.

In this first chapter the various education and training sectors in which career guidance will be studied will be outlined as well.
Chapter 2 Inventory of existing indicator sets relevant to career guidance

This chapter provides a schematic overview of existing indicator sets and places them in the general framework introduced in the first chapter.

Chapter 3 What works in career guidance?

This chapter starts out from an indication of the most current targets and goals of career guidance. Next, those studies will be reviewed that have looked into the questions as to which inputs (e.g. resources; background conditions of participants), processes (e.g. different types of programs) and contextual constraints (e.g. labour market aspects) have been shown to be empirically associated with the attainment of career guidance targets.

CHAPTERS 1, 2 AND 3 ARE THE BASIS OF THE INTERIM-REPORT

Chapter 4 Outline of a European system of benchmarks and indicators on career guidance

On the basis of the proposed conceptual framework and the substantive knowledge generated in the first three chapters a set of input, process, outcome, and context indicators on career guidance is proposed.

Chapter 5 Required data strategies

For each of the proposed indicators data sources, types of instruments and data-collection procedures are designed.

Chapter 6 Trajectory for the implementation and application of the indicator set

In this chapter the steps for further development and implementation of the indicator set are described. This includes the frequency and timetable for measuring specific indicators. Suggestions with respect to the required expertise and organisational infrastructure for the application of the indicator set on a routine basis are provided as well. Finally, the potential policy relevance of the indicator set is discussed.

Chapter 7 Executive summary and main recommendations.

9. Professional Profile

Prof. J. Scheerens, director of The Department of Educational Organisation and Management of the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences of the University of Twente in the Netherlands has a long-standing experience in carrying out EU- and OECD-studies. He has a very good command of English and French. The research program of the Department of Educational Organisation & Management is among the three highest rated research programs in the last research review in the Netherlands (these reviews cover five research years) and the Department has wide knowledge of and experience with state of the art statistical techniques.