

WORKING GROUP IV

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Issues paper



MAKING TRANSITIONS WORK

Final Conference on the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life

21-23 May in Budapest, Hungary

Key challenge #1: Widening access to information and guidance services

Introduction

Good information and guidance during the transition phase become more important as education and training pathways become more varied and more flexible, and as occupational requirements change and tend to become less clearly defined. As young people face both more choices and increasingly complex choices, the tasks of information and guidance providers become increasingly demanding, both at the upper secondary level and within tertiary education, and the target group for these services becomes wider. In addition, information and guidance services are increasingly being called upon to assist those young people who are at risk of getting lost in the process of transition from school to work: those who have left school early without achieving a qualification for work or further study; those who are unemployed; and those who are on welfare benefits. For these young people information and guidance services are increasingly being integrated with labour market and social benefit services. Rather than specialised services for the few, career information and guidance need to be seen as essential transition services for all: important for the efficient functioning of complex education systems and labour markets as well as for the satisfaction of the individual young person's needs.

Information and guidance services must provide accurate information on future educational options; develop young people's understanding and realistic knowledge of the world of work; and assist them to make satisfying job choices. Some young people can make confident educational and job choices with little assistance, but others need more intensive and often individual assistance. Some young people also require assistance with study and personal difficulties during the transition phase in order to benefit from career guidance and information services, and others need help in the process of job search. These tasks further complicate the demands made upon information and guidance services, raising difficult questions about the organisation and delivery of information and guidance, about roles and responsibilities, and about qualifications and training.

Nevertheless setting policy frameworks for and resourcing information and guidance services is often a low priority of central governments. Where decisions on educational resourcing are decentralised and resources are tight, individual schools often place a higher priority upon direct teaching than upon information and guidance. Staff are often given too little time to meet all of the demands upon them. Where a priority is allocated to information and guidance, it can be within a narrow area of young people's transition needs: for example within public employment offices rather than within educational institutions.

Issues for discussion

- What have countries undertaken, or what do they plan to undertake, in order to improve access to career information and guidance services for all young people? In which countries is career education a compulsory element of the curriculum? Do central policies exist on staffing levels for information and guidance personnel in schools and other educational institutions? What provision is made for information and guidance services within national public employment services?
- Within national policies for information and guidance, which groups of young people receive the most attention and the best services?
- Have information and guidance been made essential elements of national policies to meet the needs of those at risk in the transition: both those at risk of leaving school early; and those who have left school and not found a secure place in work or further study?

Key challenge #2: Providing quality services

Introduction

No country appears to have been able to develop fully satisfactory provision of information and guidance services for all young people, despite the many examples of good practice that can be found across countries, and despite the seriousness with which information and guidance services are treated in a small number of countries. Part of the reason is a failure to allocate a high priority to the development and provision of career information and guidance services. Part of it is due to a failure to provide an appropriate balance of services, able to meet the full range of needs. The following are some of the problems highlighted by the Thematic Review:

- The training provided to information and guidance personnel is often brief and limited. Full pre-service qualifications are often neither available to nor required of information and guidance personnel, and in-service opportunities to update knowledge and skills are often limited.
- Where the guidance function is well resourced, greater emphasis is often given to educational and personal guidance than to information and guidance for career choice.
- Often those aiming for tertiary study receive a higher priority and more detailed services than those bound directly for jobs.
- Career information and guidance are often peripheral to schools' main educational purposes, are often not clearly integrated into the curriculum, and are often not supported by quality curriculum materials.
- The information available to young people about the career choices that they face can be limited, out of date, in formats that are not appealing, and difficult to gain access to. It is not always easy for young people to relate this information to what they know about their talents, achievements and interests.
- Services provided within schools and tertiary institutions are often not well integrated with services provided by labour market authorities. The role of the private sector in providing an increasing range and variety of information and guidance materials in print and electronic forms is often not well integrated with the role of the public sector.

Issues for discussion

- What qualifications are required of information and guidance personnel? Need all be fully “professional”? Is there a role for people such as normal classroom teachers or employment office staff without special training?
- What have countries undertaken, or what do they plan to undertake, in order to improve the training and qualifications of guidance personnel?
- How do information and guidance policy frameworks help to tailor services to differing individual needs? How are those in need of more intensive individual help identified? How are specialised services such as educational counselling and job placement integrated with careers guidance?

- How can an appropriate balance be assured in the provision of information and guidance services, so that the needs of the job-bound receive as much attention as the needs of those bound for tertiary study?
- How can an appropriate balance be assured, in the provision of information and guidance services, between information and guidance directed at career choice, and counselling for personal and educational problems?

Key challenge #3: Making quality services affordable

Introduction

Whatever the qualifications and training of the personnel involved, information and guidance services have traditionally been provided in one of two principal ways: by classroom teachers during normal lesson time; and through one-to-one, face-to-face assistance. The classroom model allows a wide range of young people to gain access to services that can provide a generalised form of orientation and assistance, but by itself cannot provide more individualised assistance to those who need it. The face-to-face model allows more intensive individual assistance, but can be very costly as a way of providing high quality assistance to large numbers, as well as wasteful if provided to many for whom less intensive assistance is sufficient. Both delivery models need to find cost-efficient ways to provide information, about both courses and jobs, that is up-to-date and relevant to young people's needs.

Guidance personnel have available to them a range of methods to both make information and guidance more cost-effective, and to allow it to meet a wider range of needs. Both classroom-based and face-to-face guidance personnel have normally had available to them a range of print, and increasingly electronic (both CD-ROM and on-line), information about courses and jobs. More and more examples exist of computerised job and course information systems that allow young people to undertake a self-analysis of their aptitudes and interests, and to integrate this with information about appropriate jobs and courses. Other methods used to raise quality, tailor services to needs and reduce costs include careers fairs, periods of work experience and job shadowing, small group rather than individual guidance, student projects, and the involvement of community members such as employers and alumni in careers programmes.

The Thematic Review has suggested that high quality and yet affordable information and guidance services should be built around a number of key elements. Among these are:

- The availability in several formats -- electronic as well as print-based -- of high quality information on education and training pathways, jobs and working life, produced by specialist organisations;
- The use by students of self-directed techniques of personal assessment and job and course exploration;
- The inclusion of mandatory career education and orientation in the school curriculum;
- Opportunities for all students to undertake periods of experience in real work settings; and
- Systematic and organised involvement of community members such as employers, trade unions, alumni and parents.

Issues for discussion

- What criteria do countries use to assess the quality of information and guidance services? What techniques have they found to be most effective in raising the quality of information and guidance services?
- What methods are used to make sure that information about jobs and courses is up-to-date?
- What roles are played by employer groups, trade unions and private publishers in providing young people with career information in different countries? What examples can be given of the integration of their efforts with the public sector's role?
- Do national policies for information and guidance services allocate a special priority to ways of providing services apart from classroom teaching and face-to-face assistance: for example group guidance, careers fairs, work experience, or computer based methods?
- How are the roles of the various actors -- schools, labour offices, social welfare services, municipal services -- distributed in different countries in serving different groups of young people? Could they be more complementary, either by each developing their special contribution, or through an increased integration of their services?
- What examples can be given of information and guidance policies requiring community members such as employers, alumni and parents to be systematically involved in careers programmes?