

Supporting lifelong learning through the development of guidance

Statements and Comments

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This paper sets out the relevant UK policy, institutional and economic context; assesses the potential transferability of the host country policy measure to the UK; and notes those issues and developments emerging in the UK that are relevant to the host country policy measure.

1. Policy, institutional and economic context in the UK

This section describes the policy and the institutional arrangements for lifelong learning and lifelong guidance in the UK, and notes some of the economic context.

1.1 Lifelong learning and lifelong guidance policy in the UK

Policy making and government in the UK has many of the features of a country with a federal system. In 1999/2000 certain powers, including those covering education and training, were devolved to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales who now have their own administrations, namely: the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. With a population approaching 60 million¹, the United Kingdom is one of the larger countries in the OECD, and its GDP per capita is marginally above the average of the OECD (US\$25 400 in 2001 compared to US\$24 600 for the OECD as a whole).

Despite these quasi-federal arrangements, lifelong learning and lifelong guidance, and social inclusion, are principles that are central to all current UK policy on learning, irrespective of the separate policies emanating from the devolved administrations and the UK parliament. For example, the Department for Education and Skills has published a Skills Strategy White Paper² that sets out targets and strategies for ensuring that individuals have the skills to be employable and to enjoy fulfilled lives. Although the Skills Strategy is primarily a strategy for England - reflecting the devolution of responsibility for education and training to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - each of the devolved administrations has developed its own, equivalent strategy for skills and lifelong learning and lifelong guidance.

The targets in the DfES White Paper include those relating to increasing qualification levels, increasing participation in post-compulsory education, and increasing participation in workforce development. The strategies include supporting individuals to achieve their ambitions through better

¹ Of the total population around 5.1 million live in Scotland, 3 million in Wales, and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland. Some 84% of the population, then, lives in England. Extract taken from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003). *OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies: United Kingdom Country Note*. Paris: OECD.

² Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Skills: Getting On In Business, Getting On At Work*. London:DfES.

information, advice and guidance, tackling the obstacles that people face in accessing training and jobs, and encouraging the role that employers and trades unions play in addressing skills and training needs.

Career information and advice services are free to all young people and adults throughout the UK and are widely accessible through a variety of sources including job centres, schools and further education colleges, and the learndirect telephone helpline. However, the entitlement to more intensive, one-to-one support and guidance³, varies across the regions and can depend upon whether the individual belongs to an identified priority group. For example, for adults in England, such intensive support is normally only free to those below a defined qualification level and/or those identified by funding agencies as those most “at risk” of social exclusion.

1.2 Lifelong guidance institutional arrangements in the UK

In the UK there are a number of differences and similarities in the arrangements for providing lifelong guidance across the four constituent countries. These arrangements partly reflect the geography, culture, complexity and relative population sizes of the regions and they are also linked to differences in the legal and constitutional responsibilities that apply as described above. For example, the delivery of publicly -funded career guidance, typically by specialised “careers companies” equivalent to the Professional Career Counselling State Agency (PCCSA) in Latvia, are the responsibility of the respective administrations, and differ somewhat in each of the four countries in terms of their management and delivery arrangements. Crucially, in Northern Ireland, Wales and in Scotland, the careers companies deliver an all-age service, whereas in England different institutional arrangements apply for services delivered to young people and adults.

Another relevant example concerns the arrangements for the delivery of publicly-funded employment information and advice services in the UK, equivalent to the work of the State Employment Agency (SEA) in Latvia. The delivery of these services in England, Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of the UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and is managed across the three countries by Jobcentre Plus, whilst in Northern Ireland similar, but separate, arrangements apply.

Details of the institutional arrangements for the delivery of lifelong guidance in the UK are given in Appendix 1, highlighting the complex and varied situation that applies across the four constituent countries.

Career guidance is relevant to at least three current government initiatives. The first is its policy in relation to *social inclusion*; the second is its policy in relation to *curriculum reforms* in schools and colleges designed to raise standards and to develop a more individualised 14 – 19 phase; and the third in relation to driving forward the UK *skills strategy*.

³ In the UK, the term “information, advice and guidance (IAG)” is normally used to describe a range of services that elsewhere are often collectively known as “guidance”; in the UK, “guidance” is normally reserved to describe the more intensive support element of IAG. The term “counselling” is normally used within a therapeutic or clinical context. Those delivering counselling services are generally viewed as a specialised profession separate to those delivering career guidance.

1.3 Economic context in the UK

Unemployment rates in the UK are lower, and employment rates higher, than in Latvia and are well below the EU averages. At August 2005, the UK unemployment rate was 4.7 per cent, the lowest since 1975. The employment rate for people of working age was 74.8 per cent for the three months ending in August 2005, up from 74.7 per cent the previous quarter. The number of people in employment increased by 103,000 over the quarter and by 345,000 over the year, to reach 28.76 million. This is the highest figure since comparable records began in 1971. This quarterly increase in employment was entirely due to more full-time workers.

However, although registered UK unemployment rates are low, there are labour and skills shortages with pockets of very high levels of unemployment or economic inactivity in particular geographical areas, and social groups. Unemployment remains high for older workers, people lacking educational and vocational qualifications, disabled people, black and minority groups and residents of deprived and poor neighbourhoods. Only one in five people of working age who are not working are classified as unemployed. A study by the Employment Policy Institute for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁴ found that there was a marked increase in non-activity among men aged 50 and over during the last 20 years, whereas women are becoming more economically active as a group.

For the past decade the UK economy has grown steadily: GDP has increased at around 2-3% per year, although this has slowed in 2005 with the current annual growth rate standing at 1.5%.

The UK has a growing and ageing population: in mid-2004 this stood at 59.8 million people, and for the past 100 years there have been more births than deaths in the UK. Since the late 1990s an additional and increasingly important factor in population growth has been net migration from abroad including, more recently, migration from the new EU member states. Although many areas are densely populated - 83.7% of the people of the UK live in England – others are more sparsely populated. For example, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the EU.

2. Potential transferability of the host country policy measure to the UK

Latvia and the UK, as in many EU member states, face complex and sometimes conflicting government policy directives, which can often facilitate and/or impede progress in the implementation of career guidance services for all young people and adults. Watts (2003)⁵ states that current UK policies relate specifically to (i) *learning goals*, including improved efficiency of the education system and the labour market; (ii) *labour market goals*, including improved matching between demand and supply and supporting the notion of a lifelong career as opposed to a lifelong job; and (iii) *social equity goals*, including supporting the integration of marginalised groups into education, training and employment. The policy objectives stated by the Ministry of Welfare, Latvia, resonate with current UK policies, particularly in relation to “enhancing

⁴ Gregg, P. and Wadsworth, J. (1998) *Unemployment and Non-employment: Unpacking Economic Activity*. Employment Policy Institute: London.

⁵ Watts, A.G (2003) *Careers England: Careers services for all*. London: Careers England.

competitiveness and quality of the workforce and encouraging the inactive population to become involved in the labour market”, as well as welfare reform measures.

The concept of developing an all-age guidance service is highly relevant in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; however, in England current government policies reflect separate developments in the youth and adult guidance sectors. Recent policy debates have focussed on the potential, in England, for developing an all-age guidance “strategy” rather than all-age guidance “service”.

Although there are key differences between the UK and Latvia in terms of legislative and institutional frameworks, and the planning, delivery and monitoring of service provision, the experience from the Latvian project should highlight potential strategies for addressing (i) complexity in managing differing institutional and funding arrangements; (ii) clients’ motivation and access arrangements to suitable guidance and counselling provision; (iii) quality assurance standards and frameworks designed to support discrete and embedded curriculum and community guidance programmes; (iv) use of information and tools devised and developed for client use; and (v) professional training and resources for career guidance and counselling workers. There is also scope to share experiences on potential methods that can be used to gather evidence that can demonstrate the impact of career guidance and counselling services in Latvia and the UK.

- The complexity in managing differing institutional and funding arrangements:**
As part of its Career Guidance Policy Review⁶, the OECD identified many strengths within the career guidance system in the UK in comparison to other OECD countries. These include the extent of provision, its diversity, the efforts made to make it widely accessible, the high level of innovation, the attention paid to quality, and the research and evaluation infrastructure. However, it also highlighted key challenges, similar to Latvia’s experience, of developing a coherent institutional framework, including government agencies and professional associations, to inform and support the development of high quality career guidance services. An analysis of the use of EU and other structural funds within Latvia also highlights competing and overlapping priorities between and across agencies. A major review of adult guidance policies in England is currently underway and the Latvia project experience could potentially shed further light on organisational responsibilities and tasks, including priority measures and funding issues.
- Clients’ motivation and access arrangements to suitable guidance and counselling provision:**
An all-age guidance and counselling approach that incorporates “access to free services” would not readily transfer into the UK context. However, a critique of the key issues relating to clients’ motivation and user satisfaction could helpfully identify common issues and feed into contemporary debates on how best to diagnose and respond to client need, as well as capturing data on client motivation and levels of user satisfaction. The Latvian project clearly demonstrates that for services to be effective there is a strong need to ensure suitable

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003). *OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies: United Kingdom Country Note*. Paris: OECD.

access arrangements are in place for young people and adults, especially in rural regions. This goal mirrors the UK approach of increasing access to services including the development of e-guidance services.

- **Use of information and tools:**

The chosen approach in Latvia to extend and develop the range of information resources, including tools for diagnosis and assessment, demonstrates a strong commitment to providing increased access to vocational and career guidance and counselling services. Whilst there may be some similarities between the approaches used in Latvia and the UK, there will also be some significant differences in terms of chosen thematic areas of interest. The work of SEA and the PCCSA could help illuminate strategies for compiling and disseminating educational and occupational information. Currently within the UK there is a growing emphasis on the need for accurate labour market intelligence and the application of diagnostic tools to help assess individuals' state of readiness for career decision-making.

- **Quality assurance standards and frameworks:**

An analysis of the range and quality of services available to young people and adults, delivered through a multi-agency approach in Latvia, requires further development. However, the experiences encountered in Latvia are likely to strongly resonate with those in the UK and lessons can be learned to inform the development of a coherent and robust training and delivery multi-agency approach. The Latvian experience of seeking to achieve greater clarity within systems and processes, whilst simultaneously embedding "equality of opportunity" within high quality career guidance and counselling services, is a major challenge.

- **Professional training and resources for career guidance and counselling workers:**

A more in-depth review of the work undertaken by the Vocational Development Agency (VEDA) in Latvia, could provide a useful basis to examine the similarities and differences of the design, development and implementation of courses and modules for the training of school teachers and vocational guidance practitioners, including the development of a higher education study programme for guidance counsellors. The context and conditions that support training and continuous professional development, including the provision of information to practitioners, could be further explored in relation to the work of the National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance (NRCVG) and how this relates to the UK's National Library Resource for Guidance (NLRG), National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website, and learndirect National Resource Service for adult guidance providers in England⁷. Clearly, there is scope to build on good and interesting policies and practices, including the development of guidance-related tools and resources and assessment on the use of technology to deliver e-learning and e-guidance programmes. Latvia's experience could also be further disseminated across the UK practitioner training centres to encourage students and tutors to critique political, social and economic discourses that impact on career guidance and counselling policies and practices.

⁷ NLRG website: <http://www.derby.ac.uk/NLRG/> NGRF website: <http://www.guidance-research.org/>
 learndirect National Resource Service website: <http://www.learndirect-advice.co.uk/nrs/>

3. Issues and developments in the UK relevant to the host country policy measure

Current policy debates across the UK cover broadly similar issues that require further attention in order to improve existing arrangements. These are summarised as follows: -

- **Targeting priority groups** i.e. involving mainly those with low level qualifications and/or those currently outside mainstream education, employment and training. Changes in UK demographic patterns also require improved services for older adults.
- **Welding together a large number of different organisations, with different cultures and different practices** i.e. developing a coherent framework for multi-agency working and improved provision for young people and adults. Contrasting models of service delivery are being piloted across the UK. Initial training and continuous professional development have attracted significant interest from government policy-makers.
- **Ensuring greater diversity in the types of services that are available and in the ways that they are delivered** i.e. greater diversity in staffing structures, wider use of self-help techniques, and a more integrated approach to the use of ICT. In England, a major e-guidance initiative is currently planned, led by University for Industry (Ufi) learndirect, to be launched in January 2006. This will be supported by a major national TV advertising campaign.
- **Recognising demands on the public purse** i.e. closer examination of the application of market principles to the delivery of career guidance and, in particular, exploration of whether or not this could be an effective means of meeting the public interest in expanding provision without making excessive demands on the public purse. At present, use of government funds is concentrated mainly upon those least able to pay.
- **Developing quality assurance and performance measurements** i.e. development of national standards and frameworks to support the planning and delivery of career education and guidance in schools and colleges. This also includes an increased emphasis placed on career services to evidence the impact of career guidance interventions in order to demonstrate efficacy and cost-effectiveness.
- **Identifying career development interventions in the workplace** i.e. greater attention being given to the role of employers, trade union and learner representatives in the workplace.

In conclusion, there are similarities and differences between Latvia and the UK which offer a rich tapestry of insight to career guidance and counselling provision. The lessons learned from Latvia's experience in relation to adopting practices that are comparable with the UK will help illuminate new possibilities and provide new opportunities for collaborative working.

Appendix 1: Glossary of the key information, advice and guidance providers in the UK

Careers Scotland: Careers Scotland provides free careers information, advice and guidance to the people of Scotland - whatever their age, background or circumstances. The service is part of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise set up by Scottish legislation in 1990. The two enterprise organisations operate in terms of two separate systems and procedures and each is managed by its own Chief Executive. However, both organisations have a common national brand, operate according to common strategic objectives contributing to the economic well-being of Scotland.

Careers Wales: Careers Wales is the national brand for the all age careers information, advice and guidance services funded by the National Assembly for Wales. Established on April 1st 2001, it combines the strengths and best practices of the six Careers Companies working in Wales. Careers Wales works with young people from the age of 11 (and some primary school work in Education Business Activities) upwards, and with adults, to provide them with the information, advice and guidance to help achieve their career development goals.

Connexions: Connexions is the UK government's support service for all young people aged 13 to 19 in England. It aims to provide integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for this group and to help them make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life. Connexions is being delivered through local partnerships covering the same geographical areas as the Learning and Skills Councils (LSC).

EGSA (Educational Guidance Service for Adults): EGSA is a major player in delivering adult educational guidance services throughout Northern Ireland. It is a 'company limited by guarantee', recognised by the Inland Revenue as having charitable status. In 2004, the majority of its income was provided by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Belfast.

Employment Service of Northern Ireland: The Employment Service of Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive's Department of Employment and Learning (DEL). The service is delivered within the context of the Jobs and Benefits initiative designed to co-locate local employment and benefits services within single sites across Northern Ireland by March 2006. Although a separately administered initiative with its own policy objectives and performance targets, Jobs and Benefits is the Northern Ireland equivalent of Jobcentre Plus in England, Scotland and Wales.

Further Education Student Support Services: the provision of student support services, including careers guidance, is well-established in UK further education institutions offering mainly sub-degree courses to students post-16. Typically, the support is managed through specialised student services "units" whose staff will often include qualified careers advisers and/or student counsellors. Reflecting its status and importance in further education, the service has its own professional association – the National Association of Managers of Student Services (NAMSS).

Higher Education Careers Advisory Services: the provision of careers guidance for students in higher education is well-established in universities and degree-awarding colleges in the UK with, typically, specialised careers advisory "units" staffed by qualified professional careers advisers. Reflecting its status and importance in higher education, the service has its own professional association - the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). The service is also supported by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) which was established in

1972 to provide news and information about research and development in career-related learning and career guidance in Higher Education.

Jobcentre Plus: Jobcentre Plus was launched in April 2002, across England, Scotland and Wales, to bring together the Employment Service and parts of the Benefits Agency that delivered services to working age people. Jobcentre Plus aims to help more people into work and employers to fill their vacancies, and to provide people of working age with the help and support to which they are entitled.

learndirect: learndirect operates a network of more than 2,000 online learning centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland providing access to a range of e-learning opportunities. It also provides a national telephone helpline and website for adults wishing to access integrated information, advice and guidance on opportunities for learning and employment. Some differences apply across the three countries in terms of funding arrangements, performance targets, and quality assurance.

learndirect scotland: learndirect services are delivered by the Scottish University for Industry (SUfi). SUfi was established by the Scottish Executive as a private limited company in 2000. It became a non departmental public body, responsible to Scottish Ministers, in April 2005, and retains its private limited company status. It provides a telephone helpline and website in Scotland for adults wishing to access integrated information, advice and guidance on opportunities for learning and employment.

nextstep: nextstep is the brand name for local face-to-face information and advice (IA) services funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There is a nextstep service in each of the 47 local LSC areas in England and for each, a single, main contractor is responsible for managing the delivery of IA services and targets through the co-ordination of a network of sub-contractors. These networks typically include: colleges of further education, voluntary and community organisations, trades union representation, and some employers.

Northern Ireland Careers Service: N. Ireland Careers Service operates within the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL), Skills and Industry Division. It offers an all-age careers guidance service throughout the province. Its mission is "to assist economic and social development in Northern Ireland by enabling clients to make informed, realistic and sound decisions about their futures. To ensure equality of service to young people and adults within an open and responsive, progressive and innovative culture". Careers Advisers are based in Careers Offices, Job Centres, Jobs and Benefit Offices.