

Lessons Learned from National Reviews: Implications for the United States

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Introduction

My plan in this session is to present the main findings from the series of national reviews of lifelong career guidance policies which have been conducted over the past few years. I will first outline the extent and nature of these reviews, with some comments on the methodologies they have used and the impact they have had. Next, I will describe some of the main findings from the reviews. Finally, I will offer some brief comments on possible implications for the USA. I will draw fairly heavily on a ‘megasyntesis’ of reviews covering 37 countries which I and Ronald Sultana prepared for a major OECD conference held in Canada in 2003 (Watts & Sultana, 2004); this provided the basis for my presentation to the NCDA conference held in San Francisco in 2004, which was subsequently published in the *Career Development Quarterly* (Watts, 2005b). My apologies, therefore, to those of you who have heard some of this before. I will however focus more here on the method of the national reviews, will update the picture to include a number of more recent reviews, and will add some further general reflections.

The reviews: methodology and impact

The series of national reviews have been carried out by a number of influential international organisations. They can perhaps be described as comprising four phases, with two annexes.

The first phase was the Career Guidance Policy Review carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. OECD is based in Paris, and includes most of the wealthier countries in the world. It is widely respected for the intellectual quality of its work, much of which has a strong base in economics. One of its activities is to conduct cross-national reviews in a wide range of policy areas, to which its member countries can opt in. These reviews enable the participating countries to benchmark their progress in the relevant policy area against other comparable countries, and to share good practice, promoting their successes and learning from practices elsewhere.

OECD’s agenda is set by its member countries, so the fact that the Career Guidance Policy Review took place is itself significant. OECD had paid some attention to career guidance issues in the past, but mainly as part of examining policy issues relating to initial transitions from school to work (OECD/CERI, 1996; OECD, 2000). The review conducted in 2001-02 was the first occasion on which it had launched a full formal policy

review devoted specifically to career guidance issues, and the first occasion on which it had looked at such issues on a lifelong basis. Fourteen countries took part: 11 of them European, plus Australia, Canada and Korea.

The review process adopted by OECD included completion of a questionnaire, followed by a country visit of a week or a little more. This resulted in what in OECD parlance is referred to as a Country Note, containing an analysis of the guidance system and its strengths and weaknesses, plus some recommendations for improvement. Each of these visits was carried out by a member of the OECD team (Richard Sweet and myself), plus an expert from another country. A number of thematic papers were also commissioned. Based on this extensive data, a synthesis report was then published (OECD, 2004)

As the second phase, the World Bank decided to use an adapted form of the OECD process to conduct a parallel review in 7 middle-income countries: Chile, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa and Turkey. Here an expert was commissioned to produce a draft report based on the structure of the OECD questionnaire. One of the World Bank team (David Fretwell and myself) then visited the country for a week, following which we rewrote the country report in collaboration with the national expert, and then synthesised the results (Watts & Fretwell, 2004).

Thirdly, the European Commission, as part of its policy work on lifelong learning, decided to use the OECD questionnaire to collect information through CEDEFOP (one of its agencies) on all 29 countries that were members either of the European Union or of the European Economic Area (Sultana, 2004). These reviews were based on questionnaire data alone, except in the case of those countries that had been involved in the OECD or World Bank reviews. In other words, there was no visit process.

Fourthly, three further reviews have been conducted by the European Training Foundation, an EU agency which has responsibility for linking EU policies and programmes with candidate countries and with other neighbouring countries. The first of these, carried out in 2002 on the eleven countries that were then preparing to join the EU (Sultana, 2003), did not involve visits, and was effectively subsumed into the subsequent CEDEFOP review. The other two, however, are particularly interesting, because they have been carried out in regions experiencing high levels of political turbulence and conflict.

One was in the Western Balkans, covering seven countries including Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo. This included questionnaire responses prepared internally within each country, followed by visits from the ETF co-ordinator (Helmut Zelloth) and one other international expert, but no formal Country Note. A synthesis report has been prepared (Sweet, 2006) but not yet formally published.

The other was in the Mediterranean region, covering ten countries including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This included only two country visits, but also two meetings of the national experts who were responsible for preparing the country reports, plus strong editing of these reports. Particular attention was

paid to the distinctive socio-cultural contexts of the participating countries, and the extent to which these required adaptation of career guidance concepts drawn largely from Western practice. The resulting synthesis report (Sultana & Watts, 2007) pays stronger attention to these issues than the earlier reports in the series. I will return to this shortly.

Finally, there have been two annexes to the series which have focused primarily on particular services. The first was a study which Ronald Sultana and I undertook for the European Commission of career guidance in Europe's public employment services (Sultana & Watts, 2006). This covered a questionnaire survey of 28 countries (including Switzerland, which had not been covered in the other European studies) plus visits to seven. This study is significant because the relationship between career guidance and public employment services is often complex and contested, but crucial to the design of lifelong guidance systems.

Second, I have personally carried out two further single-country reviews which have drawn heavily from the OECD review but have differed from the others in a number of key respects. Both have been in countries which have an all-age career guidance service: New Zealand and Scotland. In each case I was commissioned to conduct a review of the service, against the benchmarks provided by the OECD review. My reports (Watts, 2005a; 2007) thus focused on one particular service, but paid detailed attention to its relationship with other career guidance providers within the country concerned. Since the model provided by an all-age service of this kind was one of the strongest identified in the OECD review, but was exemplified there by a single example (Wales – the UK involvement in the OECD review included Wales but not Scotland), these reports are in my view significant additions to the evidence base, and I will comment briefly on them later.

Bearing in mind the overlaps between these studies, the reviews have in total covered 55 countries. There are possibilities that ETF will now be extending them further, into the former Soviet countries. Meanwhile, the existing reviews represent the most extensive database we have ever had on national career guidance systems and policies across the world. There are of course important gaps, including the three countries with the largest populations in the world: China, India and the USA. Moreover, much of Asia, Africa and South America are thinly represented. Nonetheless, it represents a very substantial achievement. In addition, the reviews have been used as data sources for two handbooks for policy-makers: one published jointly by OECD and the European Commission (2004); the other – addressed particularly to low- and middle-income countries – by the International Labour Organization (2006).

I have been privileged to be involved in all of the reviews, and in 22 of the 38 country visits made as part of the reviews (bearing in mind that some of the reviews did not involve visits). My own view is that the visits are a crucial part of the process. They typically involve meetings with policy-makers, with researchers and with practitioners, plus first-hand visits to some services. If well-organised, and informed in advance by the kind of information collected through the OECD questionnaire, they effectively hold up a

mirror through which a country can view its career guidance provision as a whole, as seen through the bird's-eye lens of informed external observers.

The impact of the process depends a great deal on the capacity of the relevant policy-makers to learn and to change. It is also helped by the authority of the external organisation. OECD, for example, tends to be widely respected and its views to carry some weight. In the end, however, it can achieve little unless there is a will for change within the country itself. Where there is such a will, the review can help to reinforce and to some extent to channel it. Unfortunately, no formal follow-up evaluation process has been conducted. But in the countries for which I was responsible, my sense is that the review had considerable impact in Denmark, where it helped to shape subsequent legislation, and in Australia, where it contributed to a significant raising of the profile of career guidance, reflected in a range of subsequent initiatives. In the Netherlands and UK, on the other hand, the review had very little visible impact. In the World Bank study, the reviews had greater impact where there was a development programme funded by the Bank to which they were linked. In the ETF studies, the impact has been linked to the extent of follow-up work by ETF staff. In all cases, however, the reviews have had the potential to foster informed strategic debate within the countries concerned.

It is important that these reviews are not considered a one-off exercise. The descriptive data in the reports is already getting somewhat out-of-date. And if they are to have a sustained impact, they need to be repeated every few years – probably once every ten years or so. This would also provide an opportunity to evaluate their impact. It would be helpful in my view if the OECD could take the lead on this. And since OECD responds to requests from its members, it would be useful if a few countries could start to indicate their interest in a new review in, say, two or three years' time. Perhaps the USA could be one of them?

Key issues

Meanwhile, what are the main issues identified by the reviews conducted to date? In my San Francisco paper I offered a detailed sector-by-sector analysis. What I would like to do here is to concentrate on nine more general points.

First, the definition of career guidance adopted for the reviews was very similar, and is very close to what you here in the USA would call 'career development'. It covers services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. These may include services in schools, in universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in companies, in the voluntary/community sector and in the private sector. The services may be on an individual or group basis; they may be face-to-face or at a distance (including helplines and web-based services). They include career information (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education and career management programmes, taster programmes, work search programmes, and transition services. This

definition, partly because of its OECD endorsement, has been widely adopted both nationally and internationally.

Second, the reviews have been based on viewing this range of services as a coherent system. In reality, of course, they are not a single system. Rather, they are a collection of disparate sub-systems, most of which are a minor part of some wider system, with its own rationale and driving forces, some of which can limit or distort the nature of what is offered. But in the reviews these different parts have been brought together, and viewed as parts of a whole. From the lifelong perspective of the individual, it is important that they should be as seamless as possible.

Third, the nature of what is offered is strongly influenced by the political structure of the country, by its level of economic development, and by socio-cultural factors. The dynamics are, for example, very different in countries which are strongly centralised from those where important powers are devolved to regions, states or provinces; in post-industrial economies from less developed economies; in countries where western values predominate from those with different value systems. For example, in Arabic countries there is no word equivalent to ‘career’ or ‘career guidance’; family influences and patronage tend to be very powerful (which can reinforce social inequities but can also mitigate job loss and facilitate the search for new employment); and there are cultural tendencies towards directiveness and towards fatalism. While the pressures of globalisation produce pressures towards homogenisation, it is very important that careful account is taken of such factors in designing appropriate services.

Fourth, the reviews focus particularly on the interface between career guidance and public policy. Since in all countries most services are publicly funded and free to the user, they are effectively dependent on public policy. The fundamental underlying argument is that they represent a public good as well as a private good. The public-policy goals which policy-makers expect career guidance services to address fall into three main categories. The first are *learning* goals, including improving the efficiency of the education and training system and managing its interface with the labour market. The second are *labour market* goals, including improving the match between supply and demand and managing adjustments to change. The third are *social equity* goals, including supporting equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion. These goals are currently being reframed in the light of policies relating to lifelong learning, linked to active labour market policies and the concept of sustaining employability. The result is that countries increasingly recognise the need to expand access to career guidance so that it is available not just to selected groups like school-leavers and the unemployed, but to everyone throughout their lives. This is supported by OECD work on human capital (OECD, 2002) which suggests that the career management skills which are now a growing focus of career guidance policies and practices may play an important role in economic growth.

Fifth, while governments have an interest in the provision of services to all on a lifelong basis, this does not necessarily mean that they should pay for them all. In most countries, services for young people and for unemployed adults are publicly provided. But for employed adults this is not necessarily the case. Some may be provided by their

employers, though this is likely to be patchy and unlikely to be wholly impartial. Others may be left to the market, often financed by employers (especially in the case of outplacement counselling), and sometimes – more rarely – by the individual. If career guidance is viewed as a public as well as a private good, the roles of government in relation to a mixed-economy model of provision were defined by the OECD review as being threefold: to compensate for market failure by addressing needs which the market cannot meet, where this is viewed as being in the public interest; but also to stimulate the market (through contracts and incentives) in order to build its capacity; and to ensure that it is quality-assured, both to protect the public interest and to build consumer confidence.

Sixth, the reviews demonstrate that no country has yet developed an adequate lifelong career guidance system. But all countries have examples of good practice, and across the range of countries these indicate what such a system might look like – recognising that in terms of its detail it will take different forms in different countries. My own view, based on my involvement in these reviews, is that the strongest model is that represented by New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, each of which has a national all-age career guidance service. The only one of these covered in the original OECD review was Wales, but the review commented on the organisational and resource-use advantages of providing a range of services to be provided throughout the lifespan within a single organisational framework dedicated wholly and specifically to career guidance provision. My reviews in Scotland and New Zealand strongly reinforced these conclusions. In both cases, the all-age services emerged very strongly in relation to the benchmarks provided by the OECD review. In effect, an all-age service of this kind provides a strong professional spine for a lifelong guidance system. So long as it recognises that it cannot provide all the career guidance that it needed, and devotes significant attention to supporting embedded career guidance support in schools, workplaces, and elsewhere, it provides – in my opinion – the most robust base for a lifelong career guidance system.

Seventh, even where there is such an all-age service, but even more where there is not, there is a need for strong co-ordination and leadership mechanisms in order to articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering lifelong access to guidance. Such mechanisms are required within government, where responsibility for guidance services is often fragmented across a number of ministries and branches. Co-ordinating mechanisms are also needed more broadly at national level, to bring together the relevant stakeholder groups and the various guidance professional bodies (which in some countries are very fragmented). Parallel mechanisms are then required at regional and/or local levels, closer to the point of delivery. In some countries, seminars set up for the OECD and World Bank reviews seemed to provide an unusual opportunity for the relevant groups to come together, and led to proposals to develop a more sustainable infrastructure for joint action. Subsequently, the European Commission has been encouraging member-states to establish national lifelong guidance forums, and a substantial number of European countries are now doing so, building on the experience of countries like Denmark and the UK which have had such forums in the past. A manual is to be published shortly by CEDEFOP (2008) which draws from the experience to date and outlines some of the issues that need to be addressed in establishing and sustaining these mechanisms. These developments are closely linked to the formation of the

European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, which Raimo Vuorinen will be describing in more detail this afternoon.

Eighth, an important focus for such collaborative action is the development of strategic instruments which can be operationally useful across the whole range of the career guidance field and hold it together. One is competence frameworks for career guidance practitioners of the kind developed in Canada. Another is organisational quality standards of the kind developed in the UK, covering how individuals are helped and how services are managed: these can be voluntary in nature, but can also be made mandatory for organisations in receipt of public funding. A third type of instrument, developed in Canada and subsequently also in Australia, drawing from earlier work in the USA, is the Blueprint: a list of the competencies which career education and guidance programmes aim to develop among clients at different stages of their lives, with accompanying performance indicators. Together, these three instruments can help to harmonise a lifelong guidance system, particularly if they can be linked to common branding and marketing of services.

Ninth, the issue of marketing is beginning to be recognised as crucial. In the EU, a Resolution of the Council of Education Ministers on guidance was passed in 2004 which stated that: 'Services need to be available at times and in forms which will encourage all citizens to continue to develop their skills and competences throughout their lives, linked to changing needs in the labour market.' It added: 'Such services need to be viewed as an active tool, and individuals should be positively encouraged to use them.' This is a very important statement. If it is to be followed through, careful attention needs to be paid to how to market the services, including how to brand them. In the UK, the Learndirect helpline, established in 1998, has taken around one million calls each year, while its website currently attracts 8-9 million web sessions a year. Usage is stimulated by a marketing campaign, including prime-time advertising on television, which is in effect a form of publicly-funded social marketing, encouraging people to consider change in their lives and advancing their careers. My review of the New Zealand all-age service (Watts, 2007) indicated that the level of take-up of the New Zealand helpline has been under a quarter of that for Learndirect. This seems clearly to be related to the level of brand recognition among the general public, which has been around 30% for Career Services, in contrast to figures of over 80% for Learndirect. Such differences in turn seem linked to the size of marketing budgets: the Learndirect marketing budget as a percentage of total turnover (its budget has been consistently set at one-third of total advice turnover) is nearly five times larger than that in New Zealand.

I mention this specific example partly because I think it is of intrinsic interest, but partly because it demonstrates in a simple and concrete way the benefits of international comparisons. We can all do better by learning from each other.

Implications for the USA

So what are the implications of all this for the USA? The USA has not been involved in any of the reviews to date. It has also arguably not provided the leadership in the policy arena that it has provided in many other aspects of the career development field, notably theory development and career development research. In many respects, indeed, in this arena it has lagged behind developments in Europe and elsewhere. It has however been involved in all of the several international symposia on career development that have been held in the last decade or so – which Liz Galashan will be discussing this afternoon – and this national symposium is an indication of a will to find a way forward. I am also greatly encouraged by the news that Pennsylvania State University is to set up a Center for Public Policy and Career Development, to be co-directed by Ed Herr and Skip Niles. Ed's work in the policy arena has been outstanding, and Skip is now providing strong leadership in stimulating greater attention to policy issues in the USA. So this event, alongside the new centre, could be a turning-point.

In considering what form future action here in the USA should take, and whether a good starting-point would be a review here along the lines of those I have outlined, account needs to be taken of two key considerations. The first is the sheer size of the country. This would make an adequate review very demanding to produce. The largest country reviewed to date was the World Bank review of Russia, and since I was responsible for it, I can confess it was the review I was least happy with. With all of the others in which I was involved, I felt confident that our analysis would stand up to critical scrutiny: in Russia, I did not, even though we had a well-informed national expert and a good visit. In part this was related to the complexities of what has been happening in Russia since 1989, and the weakness of the evidence base in what is still a relatively poorly-developed career development field. But in part it was related to the sheer size of the country.

In the case of the USA this is exacerbated by the current weakness of federal policies in the career development field. It was not always so: the career education movement in schools in the 1970s, and the structure of NOICC and SOICCs in the 1980s, represented strong federal initiatives. Now, however, most of the relevant powers and initiatives lie in the individual states, with the diversity to which this leads.

My own view is that it would be immensely helpful if a review could be conducted if not in all states then at least in a sample. This is the approach OECD took in other countries with federal systems, including Australia and Canada. If the USA could take the lead in encouraging OECD to conduct such a review, as part of a follow-up programme along the lines I outlined earlier, that would be ideal. It would need to be done within a national framework, and pursued through your federal government. If not, there may be other resources that could be tapped to conduct some reviews at national or state level, using an adapted form of the OECD methodology.

Meanwhile, I think there is much that the USA can learn from the reviews conducted elsewhere. I hope that I have provided some illustrations of the learning they offer.

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Annex: Participating Countries

Country	OECD	World Bank	EC	ETF	Other
Albania				2	
Algeria				3	
Australia	x				
Austria	x		x		a
Belgium			x		a
Bosnia-Herzegovina				2	
Bulgaria			x	1	
Canada	x				
Chile		x			
Croatia				2	
Cyprus			x	1	a
Czech Republic	x		x		a
Denmark	x		x		a
Egypt				3	
Estonia			x	1	a
Finland	x		x		a
France			x		a
Germany	x		x		a
Greece			x		a
Hungary			x	1	a
Iceland			x		a
Ireland	x		x		a
Israel				3	
Italy			x		a
Jordan				3	
Korea	x				
Kosovo				2	
Latvia			x	1	a
Lebanon				3	
Lithuania			x	1	a
Luxembourg	x		x		a
Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of)				2	
Malta			x	1	a
Montenegro				2	
Morocco				3	
Netherlands	x		x		a
New Zealand					b
Norway	x		x		a
Philippines		x			
Poland		x	x	1	a

Portugal			x		a
Romania		x	x	1	
Russia		x			
Serbia				2	
Slovakia			x	1	a
Slovenia			x	1	a
South Africa		x			
Spain	x		x		a
Sweden			x		a
Switzerland					a
Syria				3	
Tunisia				3	
Turkey		x		3	
United Kingdom	x		x		a; b (Scotland)
West Bank and Gaza Strip				3	

In the ETF column, ‘1’ refers to the review of EU acceding and candidate countries (Sultana, 2003), ‘2’ to the review of the Western Balkans (Sweet, 2006), and ‘3’ to the review of the MEDA region (Sultana & Watts, 2007).

In the ‘Other’ column, ‘a’ refers to the review of career guidance in Europe’s public employment services (Sultana & Watts, 2006); ‘b’ to single-country reviews of all-age career guidance services (Watts, 2005a; 2007).