

Additionally, many of them emphasized the wish for flexibility in using the ECS at the national level, pointing to differences in approaches and training. One actor specifically suggested: "The possibility of country specific differences in our understanding of what constitutes our practice of guidance counselling needs to be written in to the document." Another wrote: "We hope that [the ECS] will have a recommendatory nature" in view of their implementation at national level and in degree programs.

Referring to the "Career Advisor" role, another actor voiced that "if NICE is to set standards for other professionals contributing to career guidance it will need to consult with those professions at some stage in the process."

***We thank the stakeholders from the different countries for these suggestions and for raising a couple of particularly important issues regarding the implementation of the ECS. In Canterbury, we discussed these and similar questions and came to the following conclusions:***

First, we would like to stress that we want to establish ECS through the self-commitment of relevant degree programmes in Europe. The higher education institutions involved in NICE will try to implement the ECS in this way, so to create a common occupational profile and establish common European competence standards for career professionals in Europe.

We consider the competence standards as a flexible framework, which needs to be adapted to national legislation and standards, the goals and target groups of degree programs, local cultural and language.

The ECS can also be used as common reference points for purposes such as the development of accreditation systems for career practitioners or occupational standards at national level.

In some countries there are occupational standards for career guidance and counselling. As sensible next step could be to look at the coherence between the national occupational standards and the ECS. We would appreciate feedback from national accreditation bodies and would be happy to support the further

development of occupational standards at the national level.

In countries, where no occupational standards exist so far, we would be happy to assist in their development, assisting academic, professional and political bodies. The ECS can be used as a framework of reference for these purposes.

Finally, NICE considers the ECS to be a living document, which shall be revised regularly. Stakeholder from all European countries will be involved as actively as possible in reviewing the standards for their updates.

## Synthesis of discussions around the critique of reality



*by Johannes Katsarov and Lea Ferrari*

**During the activities of the conference, the group of eight moderators produced a presentation of the main point discussed in their group in order to arrive to a joint presentation.** Following the moderator report, statements from other moderators and participants the contents of the statements were classified using clear categories of concerns/problems and potential solutions. The task of every group was to discuss and identify the main challenges, which career guidance and counselling (CGC) practitioners have to cope with in everyday practice. Even if our insights are not representative, they highlight important points for research and innovation in our field. Five key points emerged:

**1. The first need, which was expressed, was that for career guidance and counselling to become a profession with a unique identity.** One argument was that the conceptual frameworks for career guidance and counselling needed to be linked to a concrete societal mission, in order to give them

direction. In addition, the public needs to know what the profession is about, in order to trust and use it. Finally, people who work as career guidance counsellors need to be attracted to what they can perceive as a vocation with safe working conditions and a sufficient income. As long as career guidance counsellors are mainly employed in short-term projects, their motivation to specialize on career guidance and counselling will be limited, as well as their ambition to invest their energy into the development of sustainable services and networks. However, this was also stressed, the career profession must be understood as a wide field. While a common core is needed, which is aligned throughout Europe, enough space must also exist for career professionals to specialize on the differing situations in the various countries and regions of Europe, as well as on the large variety of target groups which can benefit from career services.

**2. Several reasons were given to argue for the proper training of career professionals, which secures their competences for offering services of good quality.** First off, culture and the influence of culture, both on the side of clients and on the side of practitioners were referred to. A **sensitivity** for a wide range of cultural groups was seen as an imperative for competent career guidance counsellors, as well as their reflexivity to look at their own assumptions and biases critically. Secondly, reference was made to the relative reliability and **limited usefulness of labour market predictions and information** in career-related decision-making. The argument made was that citizens need to be enabled to understand that the world is changing, that practices need to change (lifelong learning) and that no one has "crystal ball" (lack of security/ prevalence of chance). Nobody, not even career guidance counsellors or future scientists can know how the future will be. This makes proper training of counsellors very important, because theory (understanding of complex cause-effect relationships) needs to inform strategy (flexible goal-oriented planning, which involves use of unforeseen opportunities). In particular, the need for career professionals to understand micro- and macro-economic realities was stressed. Additionally, reference

was made to the personality of career professionals and its impact on the quality of career services. Clear priorities for the training of career guidance counsellors were that **initial and ongoing training are prerequisites for competent practice**, and that training needs to be **research-based and multi-disciplinary** in its nature. Thus, it was acknowledged that adequate competence of practitioners need to be secured. However, delegates also stressed that alternative pathways must be open for people to practice as career professionals. Particularly for those practicing already, but lacking formal training, adequate systems are needed to **accredit prior learning of informal and non-formal nature**. Finally, participants stated the need to differentiate between the competences needed for **different types of career services**: One uniform competence profile for career professionals is seen as too tight, when some services require less developed competences, while others require highly developed skills.

**3. Next, it was stressed that coherent guidance systems are needed, which integrate different types of career professionals and career services.** Not only "full professionals" (career guidance counsellors) are needed, but also community workers, teachers etc. There are all kinds of different roles and missions of different kinds of professionals with different specializations, which need to be linked coherently. In this light, some participants voiced doubts about constricting the relevant professional field to (career) "counselling", but to use broader and more inclusive concepts like "lifelong guidance" or "career development" to coin the profession. Important questions were raised:

- If we need to prepare all people for continuous professional development, why is career development not a unique school subject?
- How do we deal with passive attitudes towards career development, which still prevail in many cultures?
- How do we reconcile policy-decisions about who needs guidance? For instance, what about countries, where career services are only offered to young people?

**4. An important task for the development of coherent guidance systems will be to improve how existing services and professionals cooperate, and to identify and overcome gaps (e.g. in the availability of services or the responsibilities of service providers).** Several groups suggested to review the role of career guidance and counselling as a "networked profession". In order to fill the gap of service coordination and multi-professional cooperation, career professionals must also see it as part of their role to change systems proactively and to give feedback to other actors. It was pointed out that 'change' should be embraced by career professionals: instead of them viewing themselves as victims of change, they need to (be able to) influence how things are changing. Simultaneously, some delegates stressed that the career profession needed to keep its focus on supporting individuals, and that "social engineering" couldn't be part of the package.

**5.** Next, the participants have pronounced the need for **research to build an evidence base** which informs policy (e.g. in setting up and maintaining coherent guidance systems) and practice (e.g. through the initial and continuous training of professionals). Particularly evidence on the effectiveness of career guidance and counselling is seen as a prerequisite to acquire sufficient funding for services by some participants. Participants have stressed that this need implies both empirical research and the development of theory. Theories and approaches have to move with the rapidly changing world, which calls for continuous efforts to actualize the findings of research. It is mentioned that "talking back to policy and management" isn't as easy for professionals of career guidance and counselling, as for other types of professionals, due to their dependency on public funding. In relation to this problem, the responsibility of research and training institutions is stressed to actively lobby for services and guidance systems, which are fit for purpose. However, some participants also pointed out to the need for career professionals to engage more actively in retrieving evidence for the effectiveness of their practice.

## From Canterbury with Love. Summary of the evaluation postcards from NICE summit



by Inge van der Putten

Participants at the Canterbury Summit certainly remember they received a postcard to return to the organisation at the end of our work with their comments. Considering participants' comments, some reflections are briefly provided in this article.

What was mostly appreciated at this European Summit was that different professionals with different visions on career issues spoke a common language in designing a mission for the future. And by doing so, shared help, projects and ideas about the future of career guidance and counselling. This is especially important with the existing on-going changes in the European labour market. Participants were happy to see that initiatives at the EU level are on the right track and are being supported by effective research. Practice, policy and research were felt to be in good hands.

The presentations were alternated with interaction in groups. This was highly appreciated and is also highly desired for the coming event in Bratislava.

Some participants recognized they had difficulties with the speed and the length of some presentations because of their moderate level of the English language. If, on one hand, these participants are aware to have a translator for every language is too expensive, on the other hand, a recommendation came out that could be considered in future meetings. Sharing handouts of the presentations beforehand is suggested to help everyone to join the (lively) discussions.