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MEMORANDUM ON LIFELONG LEARNING: POLICY INPUT SEMINARS

Guidance and counselling in education and training, in the perspective of LLL

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DG Education and Culture, Rue Belliard 7, Brussels

Room 5/11

The context : guidance and counselling as fundamental tools of the strategy for implementing life-long learning in Europe

Guidance constitutes a fundamental tool both for promoting and maintaining employability and for supporting personal development. Implementing life-long learning means proposing a new approach to guidance: it means envisaging guidance as a permanent process, thus overcoming the distinction between educational, vocational and personal guidance, while addressing new customers and new users. It means also integrating the concept of life-long learning into guidance; counsellors are now demanded to act as facilitators in the process of promoting the development of a culture of learning.

• ***Life-long guidance services***

The faster and faster changes in technology and in economy lead to the necessity to adapt one's competencies to different tasks and to constantly update one's knowledge. They also lead to the necessity to re-determine one's professional profile and career several times during one's active life. Education, training and employment are not, any more, consecutive moments of life; in order to maintain their employability, individuals are urged to return to education and training at different stages of their working life.

In such a context, the role of guidance has to be strengthened. Guidance services have a new mandate, not addressing any more almost exclusively youth and the unemployed, but serving a wide range of target groups.

Guidance to LLL

The fast outdatedness of formal qualifications leads also to the necessity of putting a stronger emphasis on the acquisition of key skills. Counsellors may support this process, making people aware of the concept of flexible skills, and of the necessity to keep learning and upgrading one's competencies. There seems to be the need to broaden the perspectives and approaches in counselling and guidance, to go beyond a narrow provision of information on education and occupations and to focus more on the formulation of personal projects.

▪ *Guidance to self-guidance*

A system for lifelong learning implies accumulation of competencies in a wide variety of learning areas, crossing borderlines of institutions, geography and age. Furthermore, this implies that the individual will face a heavier responsibility; the ability to pick and combine the multitude of goods offered in the future "learning super-market" will be critical. In this context, the access to information plays an essential role. The Internet provides a potentially unlimited access to world-wide information delivered freely, thus making obsolete the traditional information centres. However, counselling and guidance do have to play a role in such a system.

In a situation where the amount of available information has become a problem in itself, the challenge for guidance personnel may also consist in helping the customers to understand the information labyrinth, helping them to analyse and convert the information in terms of personal significance. Even in the context of abundance of self-guidance opportunities, the role of the counsellor in facilitating reflection seems to remain crucial.

Core questions:

The seminar should be the occasion to identify challenges and obstacles, as well as good practices and innovative solutions, to the development of a new approach to guidance in the context of life-long learning. Here is a list of questions that we would like to pose. The participants should of course feel free to propose any other issue that may be relevant to the debate.

- How does the role of guidance counsellors change in the perspective of life-long learning? Which is the experience of existing "life-long guidance" structures? Which are the difficulties? What does the creation of such structures imply in terms of costs and general feasibility?
- Is the provision of life-long guidance services solely a public responsibility? What may be the role of the private sector in the field?
- In order to guide to life-long learning, counsellors need life-long training. How should counsellors be trained, which competencies do they need? What may be the role of social partners in training and providing information to counsellors?

- Through which channels may adults - who do not have contacts with institutions acting as mediators – have access to the guidance services ? Who may be the mediator allowing the contact with the counsellor in the case, for instance, of employed people?
- In the context of guidance for adult people, a reflection on the possible instruments for self-guidance – and the obstacles to their diffusion and use – appears very important. How well have these kinds of measures and approaches worked so far? What are the appropriate ways to assess success, beyond recording participation rates, more systematically?
- Even though it is clear that new technologies may play a very important role in the creation of self-guidance tools, it was underlined that they cannot be proposed as the remedy solving all problems. Besides, the access to Internet, for instance, may not be available, for economic reasons and for lack of know-how, to that part of the population that would need guidance and training the most. What kinds of structures have been/may be put in place in order to address especially the needs of those who encounter specific difficulties in accessing and selecting the information on their own ?