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Career Learning as a Success Factor for Lifelong Learning

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Executive Summary

The basis for our project is the EU policy on Life Long Learning and Career Guidance. In accordance of this policy we want to deliver a contribution to a reform of career guidance provision. Core of this reform is the idea of a continuous support for all students to learn career self-management skills. Our method to develop such a support was to work with local student and teacher panels. Such a panel consists of approximately eight students. For teachers and/or guides approximately six per panel.

We started by mapping the way vocational education is organised in the partner countries, highlighting the way career advice and guiding is designed. In parallel, we began to select, summarize and discuss (scientific) research on the subject. We read and discussed relevant literature. We listed all this literature in our bibliography and a selection from these were summarised and annotated for our reader. We choose an article of Mark Savickas et al. titled 'Life Designing' to be our new paradigm for career learning. The analysis if this article together with the rest of the literature gave us the common vocabulary to design questionnaires for the panels. We composed these questionnaires on three themes: making choices, work identity and self-efficacy. Next, every partner (AT, BE, ES, FI, GE, NL, PL and SC) organised and facilitated for teachers as well as student panels three work sessions. From every session we composed a report, then aggregated it per theme in a local report. Finally, we discussed the outcomes and wrote a comprehensive report. We found a lot of differences in details, but overall we concluded that there are not really fundamental differences between the opinions of the students and the tutors respectively in our countries. Based on our conclusions we selected finally to program six subprojects, together these form our work plan. Every subproject has at least two contributors. In the next months we will execute, evaluate and promote these actions. Our student and teacher panels will be called in these actions. At the end, local stakeholders like pupils, students, parents, teachers, staff, management, business community, local, regional, national policy makers will be invited to the local event that each partner will organize (goals are: dissemination, mainstreaming and multiplication of results).

In a very short time we grew into a coherent, hardworking, cooperative, critical, ambitious and pleasant team. We are a bundle of teachers working in a wide range of vocational disciplines and levels, managers and policy makers with a long career in education, and specialists on career guidance and on research and development.

At each meeting we evaluate extensively our process of working together. The intention of all partners is to extend the co-operation on developing, innovating, researching and implementing i.e. to build a consortium for a longer period and a joint goal. In any case, partners will make agreements to the evaluation of the outcomes (outside the lifetime of the current project).



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1. Project Objectives

The lifelong learning policy by the EU is a way to stimulate and facilitate citizens to enlarge their capability of self-directing their career. Our project is about perhaps the most important skill in the world of work for a citizen: his or her ability to connect the self to work. In this way citizens enlarge their personal agency to cope with a complex, global and above all rapidly changing labour market. Relevant issues are self-efficacy, resilience, adaptability, responsiveness to change, self-evaluation, critical reflection, decision-making. We think that young people should be involved from the start. So the best place to learn this is in school, where pupils/students¹ have to make choices with regard to further education and career. But, the idea that students are responsible for their own learning and career is not without problems. Effect research and brain research question the ability of younger people to become self-directing and to shape a career identity. Decision-making is apparently a complex process. However, given the assumed impact of career learning, the partners in this project stipulate that education can and should contribute to this objective of personal agency. Hence, the question is to what degree can the development process be accelerated or promoted?

So, the aim of our project is to deliver a contribution to a reform of career guidance provision. Core to this reform is the idea of a continuous support for all students to learn career self-management skills. This means that career learning has to be part of the curriculum, not as an additional, isolated subject but really interwoven with the whole educational program. Programmed this way, career learning could be the ultimate new skill for new jobs because it is about the complex and personal nature of career decision-making, namely issues of personal identity, values, and the role of work in one's life. So, career learning helps young people to discover who they are. Hence, it is not only integrating the 'what' and 'how' of learning but above all the 'why' of learning; therefore, career learning could be the true motivator for initial school learning as well as for further lifelong learning. To sum up, the ambition of this project is to make career learning possible in order to increase the personal agency of students. Teachers, trainers and guidance counsellors play a key role in this ambition. Therefore, the project will deliver to them descriptions of new work methods, supportive instruments and materials, specifications, the matching outlines for training and finally a strategy how to implement these.

Directly involved were about 50 teachers and 80 students organized in student and teacher panels per partner country, two times eight in total. By means of a dissemination strategy (see paragraph 2) the long term target groups that will be reached are teachers, students, parents, staff, managers of (affiliated) partner

¹ In this report we use the word student. Meaning mostly, youngsters aged 14-19 but sometimes also a broader spectrum of ages.



schools and sister schools, local, regional and (inter)national policy-makers, and local business communities.



2. Project Approach

The reforming of work methods and school practices, cannot be designed from behind a desk. Innovations in schools will be successful only if teachers and trainers are really involved in the development process. Reforming student career guidance makes the involvement of students in the development process desirable in a comparable way as for teachers. Therefore, local student panels have a prominent position in this project. Such a panel consists of approximately eight students. For teachers and/or guides approximately six per panel. This co-creation development method based on panels supplies a balance between the local situation and the general (evidence based) concepts. At the same time it gives a good view on, and concrete examples of suitable ways of implementing these new policies and work methods. Next, we sketch the process we passed through up till now².

We started this project in Madrid by discussing the feedback of the external assessors of our original application. We proceeded by mapping the way vocational education is organised in the partner countries, highlighting the way career advice and guiding is designed. In parallel, we started to select, summarize and discuss (scientific) research on the subject. All these sources gave us concepts, models, theories on career learning, you could say they gave us a vocabulary to analyse the local situations. One of the products of this project up till now is a bibliography with relevant literature and a reader with annotated and summarized literature. The bibliography is mainly in English because this was the only language all partners mastered. Extra is a literature list in Polish of Polish publications on career guidance and learning, and a special bibliography made by Belgium on networking (in English). Relevant also are external databases especially from the EU-institutions like https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Main_Page from Eurypedia, or http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php from Euridyce.

From all the articles, reports and books we read we chose one article to be our leading paradigm. This article is written by Savickas et al. (2009), with the title "*Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century*"³. It describes a counselling model and methods, a basic framework for life-designing interventions. We analysed this article together during our meeting in Brussels and concluded that it sketches an inspiring and important guideline on career learning. A summary can be found on our website.

² See also The Process Scheme that illustrates our work till October 2011 (published on our website)

³ Savickas, M., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.-P., Duarte, M., Guichard, J., et al. (2009). Life Designing: A Paradigm for Career Construction in the 21st Century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75, 239-250.



In our original application we planned to build a website. Firstly, in order to organize workspaces for the consortium as well as the local panels, secondly, to use it as a meeting place and a means for dissemination in favour of stakeholders, and finally, as a management tool for monitoring and reporting. However, what we actually did was build a website (<http://sites.google.com/site/eucareerlearning/home>), but only for dissemination functions. For the other functions we licenced Huddle, a software tool.

At the time we wrote our application, we chose three central themes characterizing career learning. We did this on the basis of a rather short literature search. Therefore, now doing a larger review, we were curious whether these three concepts would hold as relevant. As you could expect, we found differences between the partner countries. For example, at what age of pupils/students career guidance was started, or how is guidance provision organized in institutions and schools. But surprisingly, none of them were really fundamental differences. We found the three selected themes regarding career guidance relevant in all partner countries. So, we confirmed to use these three as the basis for our next step.

As outlined in the original application we planned to develop a questionnaire to research the opinions of our students and teachers on these themes. We used our knowledge gained during our literature search to formulate questions on all three themes. We made (partially) different questionnaires for our student and teacher panels. We also developed guides on how to organize these panels and how to use the questionnaires. During the first session of the panel, students had to start reading and answering the questions individually. Next, students worked in pairs or somewhat larger groups and wrote their joint answers on big paper sheets. Then all the papers were collected and hanged on the wall. Subsequently, students discussed the outcomes guided by a teacher or guide. The same procedure for teacher panels. In all partner countries three consecutive sessions of student as well as teacher panels were organised. We rewarded all participating students with a Certificate.

From every session we composed a report, then aggregated it per theme in a local report. Finally, we discussed the outcomes and wrote a comprehensive report. We found that teachers estimate the level of personal agency of students lower than students themselves do. Further, students in the various countries perceived the relevance and consequences of the enduring economical and financial crisis differently. For example, students in Spain and in Poland were far more restless than students from Finland and the Netherlands. But overall we found that there are not really fundamental differences between the opinions of the students respectively the teachers in the countries. Reflecting on the results and the processes of the student panels, we concluded that it would be of great value to organise a parents panel as well. We developed questionnaires and a guide for this purpose. Parent panels in Finland, Germany and Spain are scheduled for January 2012.

Based on our comprehensive report we had extensive discussions on the selection of what we were actually going to develop. Many concrete actions and ideas became



manifest. We used the labels 'positives', 'problems' and 'potentials' to put them in order. At the end of our discussion, provisionally nine actions were selected. Finally, each country got the opportunity to select two from these nine actions. In total six actions were chosen, each of them with at least two contributors. So, the idea was to work in six subprojects in sub teams of two or more contributors. And the results in view should become available for all. The next step was to inform the local panels and to discuss the pros and cons of the chosen actions. After these consultations of the panels the collaborating contributors of each action had to formulate a draft work plan to be uploaded on Huddle and discussed in the next meeting in Mainburg. Here we discussed the drafts and worked on them, and made some final changes in the complement of the six subprojects. We checked these subprojects by means of five criteria⁴, and evaluated the subprojects against the earlier mentioned *Life design* article⁵. The six subprojects are:

1. **Positive pictures: Successful goals!** ("Mental Top") Most students have during their education some, but sometimes even severe problems with their motivation. They experience that it is difficult to stay focused on their education and their career-path. From professional sport we know that the technique of visualizing is often very successful in helping sportsmen focused and motivated. Therefore we will adopt and adapt this visualisation technique for students. To realize this, we will develop learning and teaching resources and train teachers/guides. (AT, GE, NL).
2. **Networking Skills** A theme that emerged in our Teacher Panels was that while staff understand the importance of networking in obtaining and maintaining employment, many young people do not. They are unaware that only a small percentage of jobs are publicly advertised and that organisations prefer to employ people of whom they have some knowledge. Networking skills are essential for those who will progress to free-lance work or self-employment but are important for everyone in moving through and across careers. This project aims to help students to understand what business networking is and to develop the capacity to network with integrity (PL, FI, SC, BE).
3. **Resilience** In this sub project we will help students to develop their resilience and ability to cope with setbacks in their learning and their working career. Based on material from Australia (Bounce Back) we will develop learning and teaching resources (SC, NL, FI).
4. **Coaching Skills** for guides and teachers. Coaching is an umbrella concept that needs clarification. The so called 4SFC model derived from Solution focused coaching looks promising. This model describes four different types of

⁴ These criteria are: Relevance to project aims, Innovative, new, Of common interest across partnership, Feasible within available time and resources, and Potential impact

⁵ See the Minutes of the Mainburg meeting page 3 and further.



situations requiring different solution-focused roles. These roles that very well match with teacher roles (PL,ES, DE).

5. **Facilitating Peer groups** During the student panels, especially the ones in the Netherlands, students reported that they liked these panels, especially the talking to each other, i.e. to peers. At the same time the students stated that they themselves were not able to organise and execute these panels. Therefore we decided to develop together with students and teachers/guides a working method for these peer groups (AT, BE, NL).
6. **Work exploration** Recent research stresses the importance of work exploration as a means getting a grip on career choices. Also the value of learning in practice is widely acknowledged. The positive effects could be maximized by helping students to reflect on their experiences in the real world of work. This project entails a training to enlarge teachers' reconstruction ability. It trains teachers to supervise students during their reflection (DE, ES).

In the annex, we visualized the relative importance of our three themes (making choices, work identity and self-efficacy. Together these subprojects form the intended work plan. In the next months these subprojects will be executed, evaluated and promoted.

Partners have distributed the (provisional) results and outcomes in their (affiliated) school(s). Products like the questionnaires, panel guides will be published shortly on our public domain part of the website and promoted in our networks. The same for our concluding local and synthesis reports and our website. We published our project on the ADAM database i.e. the project and product portal for Leonardo da Vinci projects: <http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/search.htm>), on the site of PLOTEUS (The European portal to learning) and on the site of EfVET (a platform for providers of technical and vocational education and training, 260 hits, http://www.efvet.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=303&Itemid=224

Each partner is working on a description of their networks to make the dissemination better. Germany finalised their network in the form of a mind map. In several countries, articles were published on this project, lectures (at a national level) are given or scheduled. During an EfVET conference (attendance over 220 persons) in October we promoted in > 150 speed dates our project, distributed a process scheme plus a short description, organised round table sessions, and facilitated a work shop. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Council of Vocational Education is willing to organize a conference about the subject of the project. During the project the partners will take action in their region/country to find similar committees. In this way, we believe we can influence regional policies, perhaps more. At the end, local stakeholders like pupils, students, parents, teachers, staff, management, business community, local, regional, national policy makers will be invited to the local event that each partner will organize (goals are: dissemination, mainstreaming and multiplication of results). Belgium, for one, intends to do this in the form of a conference, target 175 attendees. The other partners are deliberating on what and how. Partners will support schools



that want to adapt work methods or the whole concept of career learning (multiplication of results).

At each meeting the partners evaluated their process of working together. The intention of all partners is to extend the co-operation on developing, innovating, researching and implementing i.e. to build a consortium for a longer period and a joint goal. In any case, partners will make agreements to the evaluation of the outcomes (outside the lifetime of the current project). During the 4th meeting we explicitly agreed to develop a follow up project. In this new project we want to implement and test on a larger scale the products we made and based on these evaluation, want to improve our work methods and products (exploitation and multiplication of results). There is also consensus about working on a future project regarding assessment.



3. Project Outcomes & Results

In chapter 1 we formulated as our goal a contribution to a continuous support for all students to learn career self-management skills. This means that career learning has to be part of the curriculum, not as an additional, isolated subject but really interwoven with the whole educational program. The outcomes of the student and teacher panels gave us a confirmation of the desirability of our target. It is our conviction that the intended subprojects will deliver contributions to this goal.

Given our goal, we formulated as our task to deliver to teachers, trainers and guides descriptions of new work methods, supportive instruments and materials, specifications, the matching outlines for training and finally a strategy how to implement these. As described in the previous chapter, we selected for our subproject work plan six concrete actions.

This chapter is a summary of the results and outcomes as described in the preceding chapter. The conclusion is that we are on track. We succeeded in delivering the results as foreseen in our original application, sometimes with a small time delay, but we did also some extra work. All the results can be found on our site, most of them down loadable, some read only.

1. Results as foreseen in the original application:

Website <http://sites.google.com/site/eucareerlearning/home>

Questionnaires on 'Choosing', 'Self-efficacy' and 'Work-identity' for students, teachers. These questionnaires are ready for exploitation by schools /institutions to do projects like ours. Free to download

Guide for organising and facilitation panels. These guides are ready for exploitation too by schools/institutions. Free to download

Reports per country (8). Free to download

Comprehensive report. Free to download

Work plan sub projects (6). Read only

Bibliography on Career learning (in progress). Mainly in English, a lot of with link to internet, to be used by anybody in Europe interested in career guidance and learning. Free to download

Annotated Reader (in progress). In English, to be used by anybody in Europe interested in career guidance and learning. Free to download

Report Dissemination Strategy. Free to download

Process scheme. Read only

Flyer on project. Free to download



Articles on project. Free to download

Lectures on project

2. Extra results:

Certificate for participating students

Questionnaire for parents. These guides are ready for exploitation by schools/institutions. Free to download

Design competition for students logo CLLL

Checklist for organising the local dissemination sessions. Read only

Network map per partner institution (GE finalised, rest in progress). Read only

Quality Plan Agenda Form. Read only

Intern evaluation form (for meetings). Free to download

Video report student panels. A compilation of the student panel sessions in The Netherlands. English subtitled (in progress). Read only

Quantitative analysis of all data compiled from the student and teacher panels (in progress). Read only



4. Partnerships

We, the project group, we did not know each other before the project, only some of us cooperated before. In a very short time we grew into a coherent, hardworking, cooperative, critical, ambitious and pleasant team. Our team is a fine combination of personal characteristics and high professional qualities. We are a bundle of teachers working in a wide range of vocational disciplines and levels, managers and policy makers with a long career in education, and specialists on career guidance and on research and development. All members have good access to their own organisation and its policy making. The consortium is formed by institutions that vary in scale from very small to very large. Besides that, the institutions differ in branch and/or target groups. Altogether, this rich mixture, is eager learning from each other and motivated to perform. Together we cover the major, if not all relevant aspects and perspectives on career guidance.

We enjoy working in an European context: not only in the project itself, but also in the social meetings we appreciate the differences in culture, paradigm, or mind-set. We are convinced and experience this in every meeting, that these differences broaden our visions, theories and practical skills. We are very aware of the different stages of development within our countries regarding the development to a more modern 21st century education, and respect these differences.

As stated in the original application, straight across our team another line can be drawn. First, the vocationalists AT, BE, GE, NL. In these countries students have to choose a vocation at a very young age. Secondly, the academics ES, FI, PL, and SC where students have to choose later during their learning career. In a vocationalist setting students *could* (though unfortunately this is not necessarily the case and mostly is not!) collect a wide variation of vocational experiences. This experiences are important when choosing a vocation. Besides that, because of the real life experiences, students could start to develop a work identity, something that would strengthen their motivation. In an academic setting youngsters have more time to make a definite choice, are more mature and develop a wider scope. We think that it would be a good thing to combine the best of these two worlds: early relevant work experiences and choosing when appropriate (and that will be in most cases at an advanced age).



5. Plans for the Future

The continuation of our project has three major elements. Firstly, the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the foreseen actions from our work plan. Project partners will work together in changing partnerships. The student and teacher panels, and where relevant also the parent panel play an important role during the evaluation. Secondly, the organisation of the eight local events directed at dissemination and valorisation of our results on behalf of students, teachers, trainers, guides, parents, policy makers, local business representatives. And also here the panels will be active. Thirdly, we will execute a thorough evaluation of our project. These evaluations are the input for our final report and publications on the website.



6. Contribution to EU policies

Our project intends to deliver a contribution to a range of EU policy goals (in italics):

Developing Vocational Skills considering the labour market needs – New Skills for New Jobs. This project is about perhaps the most important skill in the world of work for a citizen: his or her ability to develop and to enlarge personal agency because motivated flexible workers fit pre-eminently in a complex, global and foremost rapidly changing labour market.

To help improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning. Our project is designed to stimulate pupils/students to reflect on their learning career as well as their career learning. It helps them to consider not only the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of learning but especially the ‘why’. In this way their school learning will be connected to their perceptions of a career. This enables the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for Life Long Learning (LLL).

To contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field. The project aims to build a foundation for LLL in schools: through our intended new work methods, pupils will be stimulated to develop themselves, to aim for high performance and to enlarge their personal agency. This new practice will stimulate and motivate pupils/students and by consequence contributes to the quality of LLL.

To support participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market. Career learning is pre-eminently a means for pupils/students to enlarge their capability to personal agency. By consequence career learning facilitates their personal development because it delivers them a perspective and context for learning.

Developing the skills and competences of VET teachers, trainers and tutors.

Teachers, trainers and tutors play a key role in our ambition to improve career guidance. Therefore, the project will deliver descriptions of new work methods for teachers and guidance counsellors and the matching outlines for teacher training.

Besides these goals derived from the Leonardo objectives as stated in the original application form, we studied a recent policy document of the EU, the so called *Bruges Communiqué*. We collected excerpts dealing with career guidance (this document is published on our website). We found that these new formulated targets confirmed the route we developed in our project,

