

eurocounsel



Supporting Employability

*Guides to Good Practice in Employment
Counselling and Guidance*

The Key
Elements
of Good
Practice



Evaluating
the Services

Using
Information
Technology



EUROPEAN FOUNDATION
for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Guides to Good Practice in Employment Counselling and Guidance

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions is an autonomous body of the European Union, created to assist the formulation of future policy on social and work-related matters. Further information can be found at the Foundation web site: <http://www.eurofound.ie/>

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	Page
Introduction	1
The key elements of good practice	3
Evaluating the services	13
Using information technology	25
References	35

Guides to Good Practice in Employment Counselling and Guidance

Introduction

Eurocounsel is an action research programme focusing on ways to improve guidance and employment counselling services for the long-term unemployed, and those at risk of long-term unemployment. Initiated by the Foundation in 1991, it has been based primarily on work in ten local labour market areas in six Member States, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom over a period of six years. This concentration on action research means that the programme has interacted with key players in the field, stimulated service development and produced case studies and good practice guides. As a result, the programme has shown that in a rapidly changing labour market, guidance and employment counselling have the following crucial roles to play:

- they can help individuals develop the skills and abilities of self-assessment, information seeking and decision making needed to cope with the complexity of the world of work and to be a real player in lifelong learning; and
- they provide policy makers and practitioners with the tools to fill job vacancies and training places more effectively in a context of active labour market policy.

Detailed results from the Eurocounsel programme have been published in a number of reports which are listed at the end of this publication. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the organisation which initiated and managed Eurocounsel, considered that given the wealth of material coming out of the programme it would be useful to produce short guides to highlight issues of good practice as they have emerged from the programme. This follows on from the successful publication of *A Guide to Good Practice in Labour Market Counselling* produced in 1994 which has been widely used by policy makers and practitioners alike. Two further guides have now been produced to highlight good practice in the monitoring and evaluation of counselling and guidance services and in the use of information and communication technologies. For ease of reference all three guides are included in this one publication. Following is a brief summary of each:

The Key Elements of Good Practice

The first guide in the series outlines key elements of good practice in employment counselling and guidance which have emerged from the work of Eurocounsel and from the knowledge and experience of researchers, policy makers and practitioners in this field. The aim of the guide is to provide a summary of good practice which can serve as an aide-memoire for practitioners and policy makers.

Evaluating the Services

This guide shows how to measure and evaluate counselling and guidance services in order to improve quality and effectiveness. The guide also examines and defines quality in relation to these services.

Using Information Technology

The final guide summarises some of the key developments in the use of information and communication technologies in the provision of guidance and counselling in a labour market context. It highlights good practice, focusing in particular on the practical ways in which people and their needs remain the priority.

During the Eurocounsel programme, the term 'counselling' was used to include all the following processes:

- information provision (on training and job opportunities, welfare support, labour market programmes)
- guidance (direction on career and vocational options)
- advice (offering a possible solution or course of action)
- counselling (empowering the individual to make decisions).



Eurocounsel: Supporting Employability

Guides to Good Practice in Employment Counselling and Guidance

Using Information Technology

Evaluating the Services

The Key Elements of Good Practice



Good practice - good policy

Employment is at the top of the agenda in Europe: the Amsterdam Treaty reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to this, and a new European Employment Strategy has been confirmed following the 1997 Jobs Summit. There is a four-point programme of action involving support for a new climate of **entrepreneurship** to encourage the creation of more and better jobs; a focus on **employability** to reduce the skills gap so that more of the potential workforce are equipped for the jobs that are being created; the need to foster **adaptability** so that both enterprises and the workforce are equipped to handle and even instigate changes in the workplace, and underpinning all this the encouragement of **equal opportunities** so that the economy benefits from the skills of all its citizens,

Effective guidance and counselling are vital in helping implement this programme of action, and the Eurocounsel programme to date has helped to highlight many elements of good practice in the provision of counselling services. Examples of these elements of good practice are to be found in the countries which have participated in the programme, but there is a long way to go before all of these elements become rooted within counselling provision throughout the European Union. At the same time, given the context of high unemployment and associated social problems, there is more than ever a need for high quality counselling services. Counselling has an important role to play, not only in assisting the labour market to work more efficiently, but also in combating social exclusion. Counselling can also play a pivotal role in creating the shift called for in the *White Paper on European Social Policy* from a passive to a more active approach – a shift from the objective of assistance to one of economic activity.

Good practice flourishes where certain preconditions exist. These include:

- the availability of counselling services for all adults who are unemployed or at risk of becoming so
- the availability of free counselling services to those who are unemployed or without an income
- the voluntary and active involvement of users in the guidance and counselling process.

Against this background, this guide looks at good practice in the following areas:

- access to services
- provision of services (including procedures, training, planning)
- monitoring and evaluating outcomes.

Examples in the text are drawn from the *Eurocounsel Case Study Portfolio* and the country reports (see References, p. 35).



Access to services

Good practice in enabling individuals to access services covers issues such as physical access, and access through information, as well as creating the right atmosphere and environment for people to access counselling. Some elements of this practice are:

Creating or adapting physical access.

All adults should be able to enter and use the building where counselling is offered; special attention should be given to the needs of disabled people and single parents with children; buildings should be comfortable and user-friendly.

Developing outreach services, such as neighbourhood-based or community-based services so that the clients do not always have to travel far to reach the services.

Examples of good practice include proactive outreach services between community development teams and local groups (Ireland) and taking services to natural meeting places in the community such as the local pub (Erfurt, Germany).

Inserting guidance modules into employment programmes catering for the long-term unemployed.

This ensures access by bringing guidance services to participants rather than assuming they can avail of services provided outside these programmes (Ireland).

Drawing up directories and guides to counselling provision in each area.

Clients can be easily referred or can find out for themselves exactly what is on offer, where and from whom; the use of information technology is helpful in this respect as is the provision of leaflets and booklets outlining available services.

Creating a central point in a community or town where accurate information about which counselling service is most appropriate to the individual's needs can be given.

In the United Kingdom, one stop shops for the provision of guidance and counselling services in relation to education, training and labour market opportunities have been established in some towns and cities.

Producing and distributing clear information about what the client may expect from a counselling service.

For example, this information can be displayed on a poster in the main reception area of the service.

Targeting appropriate information and publicity for particular groups.

It is important to ensure that lack of information, or lack of understanding of the mother tongue of the country, does not prevent access for women returners/minority ethnic groups/those not officially registered etc.; services should recognise the ways in which they are culturally defined: in Bradford in the UK, counselling practitioners went to where their Asian women clients met rather than expecting them to come to the agency's office.

Establishing good networking systems between providers of counselling in an area.

Clients can be referred easily and accurately to the best service available for them at the appropriate time; in Denmark there are local and regional networks for counselling practitioners which are connected to a national network.

Supporting self-help initiatives which can provide increased access for certain clients.

The Austrian Arbeitsstiftungen (labour foundations) involve redundant workers directly in establishing their own services.



Provision of counselling services

Providing a quality service

Counselling services are increasingly concerned to deliver the highest quality provision, not only to meet the client's needs but also to offer a cost-efficient and effective service. Quality practice is being developed which enables these twin aims to be met. Significant elements include the following.

There should be early intervention in the provision of counselling.

Intervention should occur before the person is made redundant or as soon as someone becomes unemployed to reduce the risk of long-term unemployment; the Austrian Arbeitsstiftungen are a good example of this.

On-going 'safety net' counselling should be available.

Provision should be made both for those who have re-entered the labour market after a long period of unemployment and those who wish to receive some continuing counselling support in their period of readjustment back to employment.

Practitioners should be able to show the following.

They should have clear awareness of what forms of counselling they can offer, and at what level; a knowledge of where to refer a client if they are not able to meet the individual's needs; networking can assist the practitioner in this.

Practitioners should have, or should be able to gain access to, a range of types of counselling provision.

In this way the highly variable needs of those who seek help can be met, drawing on other organisations where appropriate.

Counselling services which are not directly linked to benefit provision should be available to unemployed people.

In many countries there have been developments in the provision of counselling services through not-for-profit organisations.

There should be targeted and specialist services for certain groups.

These include the older long-term unemployed, women returners, people with disabilities; examples of such targeted services include those for women (Germany, Austria and the UK), provision for minority ethnic communities (UK) and immigrants (Italy).

There should be adequate resources to allow counselling practitioners the time each client requires of them.

Counselling procedures

Concerns and issues of good practice in counselling procedures are to do with responsiveness, respect, and holistic approaches. There is also growing interest in and awareness of the value of accurate record-keeping, of monitoring and of appropriate referral for clients. The following are suggested as key elements of good practice in the counselling process.

The basis for working with the client should be clearly established at the outset.

The client should be treated with **respect**.

The **client's needs** should be central to the counselling process.

The counsellor should maintain strict **confidentiality** with the client about the content of the counselling interview, unless otherwise instructed by the client.

The counselling setting should allow for **privacy**, both in terms of sight and sound, and interruption should not be allowed.

There should be a **holistic approach** to the client's needs, recognising that counselling which is focused on career and labour market issues should be able to recognise other counselling needs (social, psychological, practical) and deal with them in the manner appropriate to the skills, experience and role of the counsellor and the needs and wishes of the individual.

Referrals to other agencies should be accurate, timely and appropriate.

The counsellor should keep **accurate and consistent records** which should be open to the client.

A **monitoring system** should exist which would enable the client and the counsellor to follow progress against stated aims.

There should be accurate and appropriate **collection and management of information** about labour market, education and training opportunities for the client; information technology can assist greatly in the management of such information but needs to be continually updated.

The counsellor should be able to be flexible (with time and methods) in order to meet each individual client's needs, rather than offering a standard process for every person. There should be **flexibility and variety** in the methods used, e.g. face to face interviews; group work; interactive computer packages; television and other forms of media.

Systems of **peer group counselling or self-help counselling** should be encouraged and supported; particular attention has been given to this in Denmark and also in other countries, such as the UK and Austria, where large-scale industries have faced mass redundancies and some of those facing redundancy have been trained to act as peer group counsellors.

Training and development of counselling practitioners

A new profession of counselling which deals with all aspects of labour market, education and training opportunities is developing which combines the skills and experience of a number of types of guidance worker and counsellor.

The following points are important in the development of good practice here.

There should be full and comprehensive initial training for counselling practitioners in this growing and specialised field.

There is increasing awareness that a new profession is being developed whose practitioners provide guidance relating both to education and learning as well as labour market opportunities. This 'new' profession requires recognition through certified qualifications.

Active networking with other counselling practitioners and agencies in the same geographical area should be encouraged.

Examples are the formalised regional committees on counselling in Denmark and the adult guidance networks in the UK.

Counsellors should have access to up-to-date and practical information about the labour market.

There is evidence that this is an area for which practitioners in many countries are not adequately equipped. Building links with employers and trade unions should be encouraged.

Multi-disciplinary teams should be established.

These would include practitioners with skills and knowledge in education, training, labour market opportunities and social problems as well as specialist targeted services.

Opportunities should be offered for in-service development and training.

These would include study visits/work shadowing in counselling agencies in other European countries (useful for both practitioners and policy makers); during Phase 2 of Eurocounsel, a pilot programme of study visits for practitioners was organised which the participants found to be a useful opportunity to reflect on their own service provision and the potential for transfer of experience.

There should be regular staff supervision and support for the counsellor.

Planning and provision of services

Overall, good practice in planning and providing services hinges around issues such as the participation of the social partners – the employers and trade unions – together with public and voluntary sector organisations in partnership arrangements; the decentralisation of provision; and the involvement of users in the design, planning and evaluation of counselling services. The following are key elements of good practice in this area.

Partnership approaches should be developed.

Employers, trade unions, and government agencies should work together in the planning and provision of counselling at national, regional and local level.

Access to services should be planned so that users both inside and outside the workplace can be assisted in making choices about their own development in relation to the labour market.

Making high quality counselling services available to both the unemployed and the employed avoids stigmatising unemployed people, prevents unemployment and aids smooth transitions in the labour market, thus avoiding waste of human resources.

Services should be decentralised to allow for closer targeting to local needs.

The area-based companies initiated under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress in Ireland have facilitated closer targeting of services to meet people's needs in the context of local labour market conditions.

Counselling services should be prepared to be innovative in order to respond effectively to the needs of clients.

One public employment service sub-contractor in the UK, providing counselling services to long-term unemployed people in relation to the labour market, brought in a debt-counsellor as this was seen as being the first priority by the users.



Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes

The measurement of counselling provision has taken on increasing importance and relevance in Europe as unemployment and long-term unemployment persist and the need to use resources effectively is paramount. The final report of the European Commission's ERGO I programme on long-term unemployment stated that, in relation to other labour market interventions, counselling is cheaper and more cost-effective.

The following developments in good practice in this area have been noted.

The aims and objectives of the service to which both counsellors and clients have access should be clear to all concerned; it is helpful to have these written clearly on leaflets and posters which are accessible to all.

Monitoring and evaluation procedures should be established at the setting up of the service in line with the aims and objectives.

Indicators for **assessing progress** in the provision of services should be agreed in advance as well as those for assessing progress with individual clients.

Targets for individual clients should be set and outcomes planned at the start of the client-practitioner relationship; the development of **individual action plans** is useful in this respect.

Procedures should be developed in order to receive **feedback from clients**; this feedback can in turn be used to improve service provision and the policy framework.

Both **qualitative and quantitative measurement** should be developed and used for monitoring and evaluation; a lot of work has been undertaken, particularly in Denmark and the UK, on this issue of measurement. Increasingly users are being asked for their views on the quality of the service. The guide on *Evaluating the Services* goes into more detail in this area.



Eurocounsel: Supporting Employability

Guides to Good Practice in Employment Counselling and Guidance

The Key Elements of Good Practice
Using Information Technology
Evaluating the Services



Policy background

Guidance and counselling services have a role to play in helping to achieve the goals laid down in the 1998 European Employment Guidelines: they assist people to increase their employability, to cope with change, and to seek out opportunities. They are about helping people to fulfil their own potential, and as such are a core element of equal opportunities. It is important to evaluate the success of these services against these European-wide goals, in addition to the services providers' own objectives. The *Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies* which were presented at the Jobs Summit emphasise the need to monitor and evaluate actions in this area and give encouragement to Member States and individual organisations to undertake such work.



What is quality?

Quality is a key issue in all service provision. This guide is about how to measure and evaluate counselling and guidance services to improve their quality and effectiveness. In order to do this we have to understand what quality means in this context. The inputs and processes used within the service can be examined for quality or the outputs from it measured. Within these the emphasis can be placed on assessing the quality of what the counsellor does or on what the client thinks of the service provided. There has been much greater emphasis in recent years on the client's view, and a range of customer surveys has been developed to ensure that these views are taken into account. The drawback with relying solely on what the client thinks is that some clients may have very low expectations of what a service can deliver, and therefore their standard of what constitutes quality is low.

Another approach is to focus on the organisation's systems, including financial information, staff development and marketing, and quality standards have been developed against which to evaluate these, the two most common European ones being ISO9000 and EFQM. The danger with this approach is that the organisation becomes so caught up with the paperwork to prove that all its systems are reaching the required level that it may lose sight of the need for quality in the process of working with clients. In practice what is required is a mixture of evidence:

- that administration systems are in place and working efficiently; and
- that quality and effectiveness of provision is being monitored through client feedback, staff surveys and external auditing.

Quality standards

Quality standards provide agreed criteria and measures to assess whether quality is being achieved across all aspects of the guidance service. The standard itself is usually in the form of a statement which describes its aim. Quality standards can be used to help evaluate policy measures across a number of guidance service providers as well as within individual organisations. For the latter, quality standards should cover marketing and promotion of the service, information used, the guidance interview, staff competence, networking, referral and monitoring and evaluation processes. It is useful if standards are set nationally so that all organisations operate within the same quality framework. Quality should be so embedded within the organisation that it is part of all the above.

Example of a quality standard

(The following example comes from national standards set in the UK. It illustrates what a quality standard can entail.)

Title:	Marketing and Promotion
Statement (Aim):	There is an effective process that makes existing and prospective clients aware of the provider and what is offered.
Criteria:	The availability of information and advice and guidance is well signposted and publicised to the target population.
Measured by:	80% of respondent clients to say YES to both: Q1: Was it easy to find out what was on offer? Q2: Was the service well publicised? Hidden customer to check for same.

Source: The Guidance Council (1997) Quality Standard for Learning and Work, HMSO.

Quality in some senses cannot be measured, it just is, and we know it instinctively when we see it. But in seeking to evaluate guidance and counselling services it is important to use a range of instruments and measurements so that the inputs, processes, systems and outcomes are all examined, and full account is taken of users' views and of those who provide the service, the practitioners.

The approach developed during the Eurocounsel programme to examine counselling and guidance services focused on the different stages at which the client is involved with the service: the **access** to the service, the **processes** involved (including the organisation's systems) and the **outcomes** from the service once it is delivered. This is the model used in this guide to describe the different types of information which can be sought to measure and evaluate different aspects of the service being measured.



The Issues

The approach to measuring and evaluating guidance and counselling has to be tailored according to the type of service being provided and according to the type of provider. Providers include public employment services, careers guidance services for adults, human resource development providers within companies and non-governmental organisations which aim to meet specific user needs (a high percentage of the last are publicly funded and therefore need to be democratically accountable). Each has its own goals in relation to guidance and counselling. Different countries have varying cultural approaches to and experience in measurement and evaluation methods. A few countries, such as Denmark and the UK, have a strong tradition in this area while others are only beginning to develop a framework and approach to measurement. Despite this, there are some common practices and approaches which can be identified.

The key issues covered in this guide are:

- reasons to measure guidance and counselling services
- what to measure
- how to measure
- who should undertake the measurement, and
- when to measure.



Why measure?

In line with other public services, the goals of guidance and counselling can be economic and social, general and personal. Any evaluation has to take this into account. It is essential to understand the reasons why guidance and counselling should be measured before embarking on the process as the reasons themselves can determine what form the evaluation takes. The reasons may alter during the course of the evaluation or be affected by the results of the evaluation itself.

The reasons for measuring are many.

Political reasons:

to justify what the service is providing or to justify why this particular organisation is doing it; to develop policy to meet new/changing demands.

Funding purposes:

to show existing funders that the service is worthwhile or to demonstrate to potential funders that it would be advisable to fund the service.

To measure client progress:

to assess how far an individual has advanced planned objectives.

Service improvement:

to find ways to improve services or to check that what is being offered is of high quality.

To record what is happening:

monitoring is used to record what is happening: this can enable an organisation to keep an ongoing check as to quality levels and to identify any gaps in provision; monitoring is essential to provide the information needed for evaluation.

Strategic planning:

to assist in the planning of services either for an organisation itself, horizontally between organisations or for a whole area.

Practice/policy development:

to develop new approaches to practice and policy within organisations, between them and for whole areas. Assessments can be useful for other organisations too in terms of bench-marking good practice. Sometimes political and commercial sensitivities make this wider dissemination difficult and this can lead to no action being taken.

Open provision of the results of monitoring and evaluation will encourage feedback into future policy and practice. Failures can provide more insights than success stories although it is more difficult to be open about failure.



What to measure

These are the key issues an organisation should address in deciding what to measure.

Establish the reasons for the evaluation. As already indicated, it is essential to be clear about the reasons why the measurement is taking place. The monitoring and evaluation process has to have its own objectives in addition to being centrally concerned with the objectives of the organisation or service it is assessing.

Be clear about the service's own goals and objectives.

The clarification of goals and objectives is central to the measurement of services. These dictate what should be measured, and the results should be used to alter or improve the objectives. The goals and objectives vary from organisation to organisation. They will relate to the organisation's overall structure, the functions of guidance it seeks to provide, and the target group(s) it serves.

Decide which part of the service provision cycle is to be assessed.

Is it the access to services, the process of guidance and counselling itself or the outcomes? Or perhaps all of these are to be included?

Is the whole organisation involved in the evaluation or only parts of it?

Are all the types of services provided to be measured or is the focus for the evaluation on only one or two?

Does it include all clients or only selected target groups?

Some organisations will cater for a wide range of client groups and may wish to focus on one particular client type to improve the quality of what is offered. It is also important for organisations to examine whether there is a particular client group which they should be serving but currently are not.

Measurement across organisations.

Aspects of service provision in different organisations can be measured to assess particular policy measures. For example, the provision for a specific client group in a local area can be evaluated in order to allow policy makers to assess whether it is adequate or requires improvement.

Which particular aspect or aspects do we wish to measure?

Efficiency, effectiveness, value for money, outcomes, impact? The evaluation should have its own objectives which state clearly which of these it aims to address. As with other public services it can be difficult to separate out the benefits of the guidance/counselling service from other actions happening in the individual's life.

Value for money

Few attempts have been made to assess the economic impact of counselling and guidance. This is partly due to the difficulties of singling out the counselling intervention from other activities and partly due to the problem of establishing a control group. One example of a cost-benefit analysis comes from Denmark where the Directorate of Labour undertook an exercise to examine the time which it took newly qualified academics to gain employment following a counselling interaction. The result, which was based on allocating costs to each element of the counselling process, suggested that through counselling the period of unemployment could be reduced from 1 year and 3 months to 9-10 months. This would reduce unemployment benefit by approximately Dkr 30,000 per individual.



How to measure

We can measure **quantitative or qualitative aspects of a service** and ideally a full evaluation of an organisation's services or a policy measure will involve both of these. It is generally much more straightforward to measure quantity although it is important even in this area to be clear as to what is being measured and why. The timescale needed for measurement and evaluation varies: it can involve one-off measurements such as how many clients have been assisted over a given time period through to tracking the impact for individual clients over a number of years.

Focus groups

One useful method of qualitative measurement is the focus group. This method comes from the school of market research and involves carefully facilitated discussion around one topic with a small group of 6-8 people. The method is useful as it allows people to feel relaxed at the same time as stimulating ideas and issues as those involved listen to what each person is saying.

The following are some of the key forms of quantitative and qualitative measurements for the different parts of the service provision cycle: access, process and outcomes, and the information required to measure elements of service provision within these. The list is not exhaustive, but gives examples of the types and ways in which information can be gathered.

Evaluation – Evidence and Methods

ACCESS

<i>Information sought about</i>	<i>Evidence and methods</i>
<u>Delivery points</u>	Evidence of where the service is being delivered in relation to clients. Evidence and extent of outreach work. Use of information technology to reach clients, e.g. stand alone computers; use of portable computers by mobile practitioners
<u>Physical access</u>	Evidence of suitable physical access such as ramps/lifts Opening hours and relevance to clients' needs
<u>Psychological/linguistic/social</u>	Evidence of appropriate publicity. Languages used in publicity appropriate to user groups' linguistic needs. Comfortable waiting areas. General atmosphere. Interpreters/signers available. Childcare facilities available Number of enquiries made through telephone. Level of competence of staff dealing with initial enquiries (through telephone or reception at point of delivery)
<u>Are the clients targeted getting access?</u>	Numbers of clients gaining access in relation to the potential number of clients from the targeted group (actual numbers of clients using the service compared with local labour market statistics to gauge number of potential clients to assess this) Interviews/focus groups with current and potential client groups to assess the suitability and quality of all of the above. Staff surveys on all of the above

PROCESS

<i>Information sought about</i> Organisational systems	<i>Evidence and methods</i>
<u>Overall objectives</u>	Evidence of overall objectives which clearly state the organisation's aims and how these are to be implemented. Staff survey to assess understanding of the organisation's overall purpose
<u>Is the organisation operating to a stated quality standard in relation to the systems it used?</u>	Evidence of ISO9000/EFQM or national equivalents. Evidence of monitoring systems in place
<u>Organisational structure</u>	Evidence of appropriate organisational structure which is flexible enough to respond to clients' needs and allows staff to work effectively
<u>Staff expertise and development</u>	Numbers, qualifications and experience of staff. Caseload for each member of staff working with clients Strategy for staff development in place? Evidence of staff development taking place. Staff survey on their development needs
<u>Financial systems</u>	Evidence of up-to-date and audited accounts
<u>Monitoring and evaluation</u>	Evidence of a framework for monitoring and evaluation. Evidence of results of previous evaluations being put into practice Interviews with staff to gain qualitative information on all of the above

PROCESS

<i>Information sought about Service provision</i>	<i>Evidence and methods</i>
<u>Type of service provided</u>	List services provided and frequency used by different client categories
<u>Time spent with clients</u>	Average duration of client contact. Number of times on average each client seen
<u>Capacity to provide service</u>	Number of staff and levels of qualification/experience
<u>Information</u>	Evidence of information kept and in what forms (paper or electronic based). Are these forms appropriate and easy to access for staff and clients? Assess accuracy of information. Is information kept up to date? Are staff appropriately trained? Systems for monitoring information usage and its appropriateness
<u>Guidance interview</u>	Client feedback to assess (among others): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that there was understanding and agreement of the process to be used - perception that their needs were put first - whether options were explored - whether they felt enabled to take a decision
<u>Assessment of quality of service</u>	<p>Are there quality standards in place?</p> <p>Client satisfaction surveys</p> <p>Observation of the counselling process</p> <p>Focus groups with clients to explore quality issues</p> <p>Staff surveys and focus groups</p> <p>Individual case studies</p> <p>Use of 'hidden' client: someone who is competent to assess quality of the service objectively without the service being aware of their role as evaluator</p>

OUTCOMES

<i>Information sought about</i>	<i>Evidence and methods</i>
<u>Number of people into jobs</u>	Quantify Assessment of individuals before and after the counselling process to determine progress achieved
<u>Distance travelled</u>	Quantify
<u>Number of people taking up training/education</u>	Quantify
<u>Number taking up some other 'opportunity'</u>	'Tracking' progress of clients over time (can be several years)
<u>Numbers not becoming long term unemployed</u>	Client surveys on what learnt, e.g. self awareness (refers to preventive long term unemployed work), opportunity awareness, decision-making ability
<u>Numbers still in job/training after one year (refers to 'safety net' counselling)</u>	Longer term follow-up surveys (tracking) with clients
<u>Cost per positive outcome</u>	Cost-benefit analysis
<u>Value for money</u>	Calculate cost for average client contact Quantify the benefits to clients by comparing with a control group (e.g. average length of time unemployed after counselling process as compared to those who have not received counselling). Calculate money saved through the use of counselling

The quantitative measurements for the outcomes of guidance and counselling service provision depend very much on which function the service is intended to perform, i.e. on what outcomes it is seeking to achieve. For example, the outcomes for a service hoping to help someone find employment will be different to a service which is focused on supporting someone who has found work with 'safety-net counselling'. What is a 'positive outcome' will therefore vary and the appropriate measurement will have to be used.



Who should measure

Monitoring of services is a process which should be undertaken **internally**. It involves keeping up-to-date records so that the organisation has a clear picture of what is actually happening. It can also be used for staff training and development purposes.

Evaluation can be undertaken **internally or externally** and there are valid arguments for both. A great deal of learning can take place internally through the process of evaluation, particularly if this is led by someone with a clear understanding of what the process of evaluation involves.

External evaluations are often undertaken by independent researchers and consultants. The benefit is that the organisation is assessed independently and this can be important depending on why the evaluation is taking place: if it is for funding purposes, funders may wish to see an objective, outside view. External assessors should possess well-developed evaluation skills which internal staff may or may not possess.

Evaluation between organisations can enhance networking but is clearly sensitive. It is not commonly undertaken but should be further developed as the benefits in terms of staff development and service improvements can be high.

It is essential to gain the **views of potential and actual clients** in order to assess quality of services through some of the methods outlined in the section on methods.

It is also important to gain the **views of the staff involved** in the service provision as they have a particular understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of what is being provided.



When to measure

The framework for monitoring and evaluating should be designed from the outset when an organisation or service is established and resources earmarked to allow for monitoring and evaluating to happen on a regular basis. Monitoring should be an ongoing process. It provides the basic tools which we use for assessment and evaluation. Monitoring includes keeping records of how many clients are seen, for how long and of what services are provided to each client.

Evaluation should take place at regular intervals, ideally with an annual evaluation undertaken internally and a bi-annual or three-yearly external evaluation. It is also important to bear in mind how longer-term outcomes can be evaluated: the process of counselling can vary in length and its impact may not be immediately felt or obvious. Some longitudinal measurement should be established, if possible including the use of a control group so that those who have received the service on offer can be compared to those who have not. There are ethical issues involved in the latter process: having a control group may mean withholding services from that group and this can be extremely difficult to do in practice. Despite this, it is considered good practice to attempt some form of control group comparison, perhaps by comparing groups in two areas, where only one area has a particular service.

Tracking clients' progress

In Ireland, FAS, the Irish Training and Employment Authority, has developed a database programme which allows staff to monitor their clients' progress. The database keeps up-to-date records of clients' contacts with FAS, CVs, what the individual would like to do and any action taken. This part of the database can then be linked to FAS employer contacts and to any vacancies which arise. One of the strengths of the system is the diary appointment facility which helps to manage follow-up with clients and maintain contact with employers.



Policy implications

Guidance and counselling are a central element of effective active labour market and welfare policies. Nationally agreed quality standards for guidance and employment counselling services help establish a framework in which monitoring and evaluation can take place. At European level, further opportunities need to be created to allow policy makers to share information about quality standards and approaches to the evaluation of guidance and employment counselling, and to allow practitioners to exchange good practice in monitoring and evaluation procedures.



Eurocounsel: Supporting Employability

Guides to Good Practice in Employment Counselling and Guidance

The Key Elements of Good Practice
Evaluating the Services
Using Information Technology



Policy background

The emergence of the Information Society continues to have a major impact on economic and social life. Information and communication technology (ICT) makes new forms of working possible and increases globalisation. The world of work has changed dramatically, and will continue to do so. These changes bring new opportunities and also challenges, for society, for the labour market, and for the individual. Within Europe the importance of lifelong learning has been emphasised: in order to remain competitive and maintain the employability of the workforce, we need to equip individuals with up-to-date and relevant skills and help them to develop the capacity to cope with this world of frequent transitions.

A potential danger in the greater use of ICT, however, is that it might reinforce rather than reduce existing inequalities and divide society into information 'haves' and 'have-nots'. At the same time ICT could be used to alleviate social exclusion. A key issue is that people, and excluded groups in particular, should not be forced to adjust to the new technologies. Rather the technologies must become better geared to human needs. (EC 1997)

This need to put people first and adapt technologies to their needs was stressed in the European Commission's Green Paper *Living and Working in the Information Society: People First* (EC 1996). It is essential that guidance and counselling services (and all public services) keep this principle at the top of the agenda as ICT is increasingly introduced into all aspects of provision. Exclusion can have many different dimensions in relation to ICT: gaining access to equipment, the need to have the technical confidence to use it (which particularly tends to affect older people), the general problem of literacy and the fact that English is the dominant language for the Internet. All of these have to be borne in mind in order to establish good practice and avoid greater exclusion.



The issues

Information and communication technologies and their use within guidance and counselling services are being developed and expanded all the time. The main ways in which such services are using ICT are summarised here with issues of good practice highlighted, in particular focusing on the practical ways in which people and their needs can be kept as the priority. The services covered are all those which offer assistance to the individual in terms of their employment, training or educational opportunities. Some examples are given to illustrate the developments.

The key areas covered are:

- organisation and planning
- issues relating to access to services
- issues relating to the process of delivering guidance and counselling
- issues relating to outcomes
- policy implications.



Organisation and planning

Planning, at many different levels, is an essential element of good practice. **At national level** there should be a strategy which sets out clearly the role of guidance and counselling in relation to adults and their working and learning lives and incorporates a strategy for the effective use of ICT within the services provided. Without such a strategy it is likely that there will be uneven developments with certain sections of society excluded from these increasingly essential services.

At local area level there should be a strategic plan which examines the overall provision of guidance and counselling in the area and addresses any gaps in provision. This plan must identify and evaluate why and how ICT will be used to improve the delivery of services in general. It should examine specifically the use of ICT in relation to social exclusion and how it is to be used to reduce rather than increase this problem. It should also set out a strategy for networking between the different providers and across relevant public services (such as a link to benefits advice services, for example).

Within organisations there should be an overall plan which covers the role of ICT, the ways in which it will be used to enhance service provision for the user, support for staff development in the use of ICT and indications of the likely balance between the use of ICT and the practitioner's own time with clients. If an organisation is introducing new technology for the first time there should be a clear implementation plan including how it is to be introduced to users as well as staff and how users can be involved in the design and choice of systems so that the technology is people-led. The plan should include reference to resource implications: these do not just concern the buying of equipment but its maintenance and upgrading, in addition to the resource implications of staff training and development for its use.



Access to services

Technology must be used to increase access to guidance and counselling services and not to decrease it. Access to services is the main area in which it should be possible to see immediate benefits from the greater use of information and communication technologies. These are some of the ways in which this can happen.

Telephone helplines: national telephone helplines with a freephone number which in turn direct the caller to local guidance practitioners can provide an easy route for those who are seeking guidance help and do not know immediately where to turn.

Telephone helplines should be staffed by trained guidance information workers to ensure that the assistance given is of the highest quality.

The telephone helpline must be adequately publicised in such a way as to allow for inclusion of all parts of society.

The Internet is opening up access to learning and employment information across the world and allows for greater ease of communication of information through the use of emailing and interactive video links. The potential for finding information through the Internet is enormous. However, finding the information you want, assuming that you have access to the Internet itself, can be difficult. It is also impossible at present to guarantee the quality of information available through the Internet, as anyone can place information on a website.

Concise and up-to-date directories of website addresses will ease access to the range of information and could allow for some guarantee of quality, e.g. the website addresses listed in such a directory would be all those providers who have reached a specified quality standard in relation to the information provided through the Internet.

Access to the Internet has to become more widely available if exclusion is to be avoided. Ability to gain access should be offered through a range of public outlets including libraries, shopping centres and employment service offices with staff on hand to assist those who are unfamiliar with using it.

E-mail dialogues or chat lines by which people can work with a counsellor through e-mailing is less immediate than telephone contact but can again be useful particularly for remoter areas. It demands some level of competence in terms of literacy and keyboard skills. E-mail and Internet discussion boards can also be used for general 'chatting' to share problems and perspectives.

Access to e-mail and guidance through this route in remoter areas should be developed through public centres such as libraries where staff are on hand to help.

Video interactive links connect telephones and computer screens so that the client has direct access to a guidance specialist. This has particular relevance for individuals in remote areas but also allows access to people who perhaps require specialist help or who only require minimal help and can undertake most of what they want to do for themselves with the aid of different software packages.

A touch screen menu helps the client identify which programmes they require and does not require previous keyboard or computer skills. Video interactive links can also connect to guidance and counselling specialists for additional help. This approach has the potential to allow access to greater numbers of users, who can take control for themselves of when they need to see the guidance specialist. However, it also requires confidence to sit down and use the computer and this may be more difficult for older people and those with literacy and linguistic problems.

The use of stand-alone computers should be developed as part of an area's overall strategy for guidance provision. It does not remove the need for physical buildings where people can meet face to face but it can open up access to those who live far away from such services and for those who wish to make use of the guidance specialist occasionally.

Portable computers, which carry the main software programmes and which can be linked by telephone to the Internet, allow practitioners to go where the client is based. This increases the potential for access to be much more client-centred and can play an important part in addressing the issue of exclusion by going to the places, such as peripheral housing estates, where the most marginalised live who have the lowest levels of mobility. It also allows counsellors to go to companies where people are facing redundancy to work on the spot with the workforce.

Service professionals should assess the use of portable computers as a way of enhancing access to the service they provide, in particular to those who are most excluded, develop a strategy for their use as part of an overall plan, and train staff to operate in a peripatetic way.



The process of delivering guidance and counselling

There is now a wealth of software programmes for use by guidance and counselling practitioners and some software for use directly by users. Mostly it is still assumed that clients will wish to make use of the practitioner's expertise and in most cases this is advisable. The main purposes for which these, and the information available through the World Wide Web, are used include:

- the diagnosis of needs
- information on opportunities
- self-assessment
- decision-making
- implementing decisions/action planning
- the administration of guidance and counselling services
- the monitoring and evaluation of services
- training for practitioners.

Each of these is explained in a little more depth below and good practice highlighted. General good practice requires that service providers keep up-to-date with the software available and that staff should be properly trained in each software application offered. The use of software packages does not remove the need for face-to-face contact between guidance specialists and users: some users will not be comfortable using computer-based applications on their own and will wish to have a practitioner's help. For those who do feel comfortable using the software there may still be areas in which they wish to have a qualitative discussion with the guidance practitioner. Flexibility in the use of technology is essential if a service is to remain client-centred.

Diagnosis of needs

Software systems exist and are being developed that assist the individual in the first parts of the counselling and guidance process, namely the diagnosis of needs. A 'menu' of choices on the computer screen leads the client to the right software programmes to meet their requirements. This allows an individual to work through parts of the guidance process without the help of a guidance practitioner if this is what they want.

The 'virtual receptionist'

The virtual receptionist offers a computer-based reception service to interpret the guidance needs of clients and refers them to the appropriate information and guidance resources to fulfil their needs. It allows the client to access the full range of guidance provision through one central point.

Information on opportunities

This is the primary way in which ICT is being used within guidance and counselling. Information concerning education, training and employment opportunities and on what specific occupations are about is available through software programmes, through the Internet and through CD-ROMs including games and simulations of real-life workplaces. The possibilities are endless. The key issue in relation to information databases is how the quality of information provided can be maintained. It is essential that information is accurate and up to date. Providers and suppliers of information have to address this issue and allow adequate resources for information to be regularly reviewed and improved.

EURES

EURES (European Employment Services) is a computerised database offering information about job vacancies and general information on living and working conditions in each of the Member States. It is available through a network of Euroadvisers in each country. The aim is to facilitate the movement of labour in the European Union.

Self-assessment

One of the main elements of the guidance process is to enable the individual to understand their needs and aspirations clearly and increase their awareness of appropriate opportunities to enable them to take decisions with regard to employment, learning and training. There are a range of software tools available to assist in this process of self-assessment, from straightforward questionnaires to psychometric tests. Where a user works on self-assessment packages alone it is important to provide the opportunity for discussion with a guidance practitioner once the person has completed the assessment to allow for further reflection, where required.

Psychometric tests

Many of the packages available are based on previous paper versions and may require additional practitioner help in using and understanding them. Examples of software include the AIST (Allgemeiner Interessentest) from the Vienna Test System in Austria, Studie-Interessewijzer in the Netherlands and Ateliers d'Evaluation from France. Mostly such packages concentrate on work-related interests but some examine leisure-related interests, e.g. QIL from France.

Decision-making

There are programmes available to assist clients to develop skills in decision-making but these are less common as clearly this is a more complex area. The programmes help the person to prioritise what is most important to them or to challenge values and attitudes behind potential decisions. New virtual reality systems are being developed in the USA which will allow the user to sample what doing a particular kind of job is really like and allow them to base their decision on a closer understanding of what that kind of work entails. The area of decision-making is one which should remain a priority for practitioner involvement with the client. Practitioners should continue to receive training in this part of the process as they also need to understand how to make most effective use of the information which the client has secured through working on software.

Implementing decisions/action planning

These are programmes to assist with action planning, personal development plans and CV preparation. Voice-activated, rather than keyboard-based, CV packages exist, and this approach is likely to spread to other areas of software development although at present there are drawbacks as it takes time for a computer to 'learn' the user's voice. To date the voice-activated inputting has been undertaken by practitioners.

Personal development plans

An element of the lifelong guidance and lifelong learning approach to work and training is the importance of recording both what one achieves in different education and work settings and of planning for the future. The different future plans which an individual makes over the years can also be stored on the overall personal development plan (PDP) so that s/he can look back over time and see how they have developed and can be stimulated to take new action. Personal development plans can be usefully stored on disk so that they can be amended and updated with ease. Examples of software include Personal Development Planner (UK), H-Plan (Denmark) and Dialogue (Sweden).

The administration of guidance and counselling services

Once different guidance and counselling providers in a local area are linked up through a computer network it should ease the referring of clients between providers and give greater access to the multi-functional service offered. It can also allow greater cross-contacts between providers and between different public services to increase collaboration and allow the user to gain access to a wider range of services. The ability to hold large amounts of information and the relative ease with which these can be analysed can also assist policy makers in the development of strategic planning for service provision.

Providers should examine their use of ICT in relation to their administrative systems to ensure that the maximum effectiveness and efficiency are gained. Within an organisation this is likely to involve a thorough examination of how information about clients is stored and used. Within an area it will be useful to undertake an audit of what each provider uses in terms of ICT equipment and software so that the potential for networking can be explored and expertise shared.

Local areas should, as part of their area strategy for guidance and counselling, examine the possibility of computer links between different providers and across public services so that the needs of the user can be prioritised and wastage of resources reduced.

The monitoring and evaluation of services

The ability to keep records up to date and easily accessible is an essential element in the process of monitoring and evaluation of services. It provides the opportunity to analyse much greater quantities of information with ease and should lead, through the process of evaluation, to improvements in services. The guide on *Evaluating the Services* examines this in greater detail.

All providers should have a framework for monitoring and evaluation which includes the relevant use of ICT for storing and retrieving monitoring information. Monitoring should take place at area level as well as within organisations so that an overall picture can be provided: who is accessing guidance and counselling services; what are the outcomes; if there are problems of exclusion.

Training for practitioners

The role of guidance and counselling practitioners is changing because of the changing labour market and because of the impact of ICT. This leads to major training needs both in terms of understanding and handling ICT but also in relation to the role itself: many more people will be able to access directly information which in the past would have been controlled by the practitioner. The practitioner has to learn what his or her new role should be: it is likely that it will require more management of information and communication systems, the ability to use his/her skills in one-to-one and group situations at the most appropriate points in the client's progression and more distance work through video-conferencing and telephone. Provision must be made, and time and resources allocated, to ensure that staff are adequately trained in all aspects of working with ICT.



Outcomes

Outcomes from guidance and counselling services include both those which are quantitative (i.e. number of people entering employment/entering training or education) and qualitative, i.e. the ways in which the individual client has progressed in relation to their ability to weigh up choices, reduce risks and make decisions. ICT can be used to assist in both areas:

- ICT can assist in the monitoring and evaluation of the quantitative aspects of service provision;
- clients' progress can be tracked over time by logging and analysing key information at certain points. This can allow for greater efficiency in terms of follow-up with clients who may require specialist or further help, e.g. the computer can indicate when a person is due to finish a course and place a reminder to the practitioner to find out what has happened to that person;
- if different providers are electronically networked, referrals can be made more easily and the client may not have to do so much explaining of their situation as they move from one provider to another.



Policy implications

How can good practice in the use of information and communication technologies within guidance and counselling services best be supported at European level? One way in which this can be assisted is through the dissemination of best practice: at present there is very little transfer of experience between practitioners in different countries and regular information about latest developments. This could be provided through a newsletter or forum on the Internet together with more opportunities, such as conferences, for people from different countries to meet and discuss new developments. It is clear that guidance and counselling services have a key role to play in the successful management of the European labour market and if ICT is to be used to increase their efficiency and effectiveness and improve the services the user receives, benchmarking good practice from organisations which are active in this area is essential. ICT should be user led and the focus on this approach should start at European level and work through national and local area strategies.

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Supporting Employability

Guides to Good Practice in Employment Counselling and Guidance

Eurocounsel is an action research programme focusing on ways to improve guidance and employment counselling services for the long-term unemployed, and those at risk of long-term unemployment. It has been based primarily on work in ten local labour market areas in six Member States and detailed results from the Eurocounsel programme have been published in a number of reports. This publication contains three guides highlighting issues of good practice as they have emerged from the work of Eurocounsel and from the knowledge and experience of researchers, policy makers and practitioners in this field.

The Key Elements of Good Practice

Outlines key elements of good practice in employment counselling and guidance and provides a summary of good practice which can serve as an aide-memoire for practitioners and policy makers.

Evaluating the Services

Shows how to measure and evaluate counselling and guidance services in order to improve quality and effectiveness. The guide also examines and defines quality in relation to these services.

Using Information Technology

Summarises some of the key developments in the use of information and communication technologies in the provision of guidance and counselling in a labour market context and highlights good practice, focusing in particular on the practical ways in which people and their needs can remain the priority.

