

# Lifelong Access to Career Guidance – a Key to Lifelong Learning

## Interview with Professor Tony Watts

**The level of expectations raised in EU policy papers on lifelong guidance is high when requiring that guidance should enable citizens to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths at any time in their lives.**

**How can such an ambitious concept be implemented and embedded into the educational and employment system? Professor Tony Watts, dealing with career guidance for over 30 years and gaining insights on the worldwide development of guidance due to his work as international consultant, will give us answers to this question and related issues.**

**BWP** Let's start with a look back: Do you remember who guided you on your career path from student (at school) to professor at university? Which of these encounters were crucial for you from today's perspective?

**WATTS** My career path was somewhat unconventional. I read History at Cambridge and then entered publishing and journalism before co-founding a non-profit organisation – the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) – to improve the quality of career guidance in schools and beyond. Our initial aims were very simple and practical. But then I started to read and realised that career development was very complex – and fascinating. So I decided to go back to university to do a postgraduate degree in Sociology. In the course of making this decision, I had a transformational career counselling interview with a career counsellor. It helped me to understand what I had already done, and what I now wanted to do. It gave me clarity and confidence. Much of my subsequent work has been about developing stronger research and policy foundations for providing such opportunities to others.

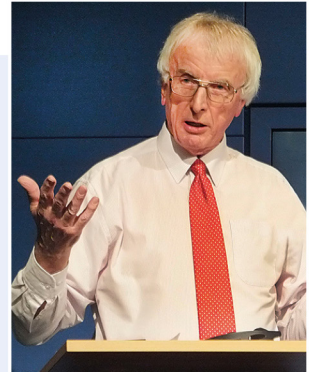
**BWP** Policy papers emphasise that career guidance is a key to make lifelong learning become reality. Are individuals not able to cope with the wide range of VET options and career choices on their own? Why do they need professional assistance to find out what they should or could learn and make best use of their competencies and talents?

**PROF. TONY WATTS** was until his recent retirement an international policy consultant on career guidance and career development, based in Cambridge, England.

He was previously joint founder of the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) in Cambridge, was Director of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) from 1975 to 2001 and is now Emeritus Professor of Career Development at the University of Derby.

He has published many books and articles, and was founder of the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* which he edited from 1973 to 1999.

He has carried out many comparative studies of career guidance systems, and has been a consultant to the European Commission, OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank.



**WATTS** Lifelong access to career guidance is indeed a key to lifelong learning. In my view career education should be an integral part of all education programmes – including VET programmes. Professional career guidance should be a mandatory part of initial education, and available thereafter as and when people wish to use it. Not everyone needs such professional guidance at all stages: many learn how to manage resources to make careers decisions for themselves. But a key career management skill is to know what careers guidance services can provide, when to access them, and where they can be found.

**BWP** In your OECD paper about the relationship of career guidance to VET you mention two distinct stages: guidance prior to entering a VET programme and within the VET programme. Looking at the first stage: Which are the challenges of career education and guidance considering that in some European countries more than 15 percent of young people aged 15 to 24 are neither in employment nor in education and training programmes?

**WATTS** Access to career guidance is particularly important for young people who are ›NEET‹ (not in employment or in education and training) and should be an integral part of any programmes designed to address the needs of such

young people, ensuring that these programmes are stepping-stones rather than dead-ends.

**BWP** What are the main purposes of career guidance within VET programmes and is it necessary to make them a part of the training curriculum?

**WATTS** The key principles are that career guidance should be available at all relevant decision points, and on exit; and that career education should be included in curriculum design both to prepare students for future career decisions and to support the transferability of their learning. The latter point is particularly important: it should include attention not only to career paths within the occupations to which the programme is designed to lead, but also in other occupations to which the skills and competences acquired within the programme are transferable, so making the concept of transfer transparent and tangible.

**BWP** In analysing careers of middle-aged individuals, a CEDEFOP study published in 2014 identified many cases of unstable career paths that often arise due to a lack of access to career information. How can access to guidance services be improved, particularly for poorly educated and disadvantaged target groups?

**WATTS** It is difficult to generalise about this, because the nature of the services available to adults varies so much across countries. Public employment services clearly have a key role to play, though care has to be taken to ensure that career guidance within such services is addressed to the needs of the individual rather than to narrowly conceived outcome measures. Within the UK we have some experience of all-age guidance services linked more closely

to education and skills. There has also been a strong tradition of incorporating career guidance elements within voluntary and community services which can be closer to the needs of disadvantaged groups.

**BWP** You have carried out a number of comparative studies of guidance systems around the world. What elements contribute to a good national policy of lifelong guidance? Which general conditions will enhance implementation of such a policy?

**WATTS** The most important and most influential studies in which I was involved were the overlapping studies conducted by OECD, the European Commission and the World Bank some 12–15 years ago. Our general conclusion was that no country had developed a comprehensive and fully effective policy for lifelong guidance, but that looking across the countries, the key components of such a policy could be identified. The subsequent work of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) was designed to help countries to develop such policies, recognising that they would differ in nature across countries, but would involve common core components, and would benefit from processes of sharing across countries. The Network achieved a great deal. Although its work has now ended, it is important that new mechanisms should be established to continue this process of peer learning and mutual support.

»» Career education should prepare students for future career decisions and support the transferability of their learning. ««

**BWP** Career guidance is a main topic on the international agenda and there are considerable investments made for the purpose of expanding the relevant guidance services. Do we know enough about the effects of career guidance? What further research is needed in this field?

**WATTS** My UK colleague Professor TRISTRAM HOOLEY produced an excellent report for ELGPN about the evidence base on lifelong guidance (see Infobox, ELGPN Tools No. 3). This provides an invaluable summary of the current state of international knowledge on the effects of career guidance. Such evaluation needs to be routinely built into the design of service provision. In addition, we need more research on the longer-term impact of career guidance programmes. If a few strong studies could be mounted to demonstrate the relationship between immediate learning outcomes and longer-term social and economic outcomes, the learning outcomes could thereafter be viewed not only as of value in their own right but also as proxies for the longer-term outcomes.

(Interview: Christiane Jäger)

**European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)**

The Network was established in 2007, with the aim of assisting its member-countries and the European Commission in developing European co-operation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. The Network promoted lifelong guidance, particularly through the Open Method of Co-ordination in 2007–2015.

As an outcome of the 2007–15 Work Programmes the ELGPN developed a comprehensive range of EU reference tools and publications for European lifelong guidance policy and systems developments, for example the following **ELGPN Tools**:

1. A European Resource Kit
2. LLG Glossary
3. The Evidence Base on Lifelong Guidance: A Guide to Key Findings for Effective Policy and Practice
4. Designing and Implementing Policies Related to Career Management Skills (CMS)
5. Strengthening the Quality Assurance and Evidence-Base for Lifelong Guidance
6. Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance

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