

Career guidance and counselling for mobilities

ABSTRACT

In its first part, the article provides a basic overview on guidance and counselling for mobility issues at universities, focusing on the possibilities and role of guidance and counselling for both sent and received mobility participants. Recommendations by the EU institutions and by the European Forum for Student Guidance (FEDORA) are also briefly discussed. The second part of the article is based on an interview and a survey of mobility participants. It illustrates their perception of intercultural competences determining the quality and effectiveness of mobility stays. The final part of the article offers implications and ideas to improve quality of guidance and counselling, and multicultural counselling for mobility participants in particular.

KEYWORDS: mobility, university guidance, counselling, sent/ received participant, intercultural counselling, intercultural competences, improving quality of mobilities

INTRODUCTION

The universities' tasks arising from the Council Resolution on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a

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global knowledge economy (Council Resolution 2007) are not small: challenges related to globalization require opening the European higher education and research space to the world. In accordance with that, there is demand for increasing the mobility of university students, researchers and education staff. The Resolution asks the member states to support internalization of HE institutions also through enhancing mobilities. For that purpose, they should adopt measures to broaden the social aspect of HE by means of improving support for students and researchers in the EU and by providing information and guidance related to studies, mobility and career opportunities. The services listed above are part of career information, guidance and counselling services.

In case of guidance for sent and/ or hosted participants in mobilities, multicultural (intercultural) guidance and counselling can be applied.

LIFELONG CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Definition: Career¹ guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers (Sultana, Watts, 2004). (Information, guidance and counselling services – here simplified as „career guidance services“ (Fretwell, David, Watts, 2004).

In contrast with the traditional educational and vocational guidance, career guidance emphasizes personal integrity – the

¹ Professional terminology includes also terms *vocational* and *prevocational* guidance. *Pre-vocational* refers to issues concerning the vocational and training phases – before entering the world of work. *Vocational* refers to lifelong support related to work, employment, job, vocation and labour. The term post-vocational is sometimes used in reference to the issues in retirement age. [4].

holistic approach – and, through recognizing coherence between the spheres, it crosses the borders between educational, vocational and personal guidance (so-called Guidance Triangle). The focus in education is on developing individuals' skills for making life, educational and vocational choices and managing their own careers see: Sultana, Watts. 2004), (Fretwell, Watts, 2004), (Koščo, 1980) (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning 2000), (Sultana, 2004), (Resolution 2008).

Provided services: * career information (in printed, electronic and/ or other forms), * assessment (including psychological diagnostics) and self-assessment tools, * guidance and counselling interviews, * career education and career development programmes (focused on self-awareness, perception of opportunities and developing career management competences – skills for job seeking, presentation skills, competences for making decisions etc.), * job-seeking and job-placement programmes, * services for transition periods, * accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL), * mentoring, facilitation etc. (Sultana, Watts, 2004).

Forms of guidance provision: 1/ face-to-face: individually as well as in a group/ collective form; 2/ distance, using ICT: on-line and/ or off-line (e-mail, chat, phone and web-based services) (Sultana, Watts, 2004). Using ICT is particularly effective in information and guidance services. In case of mobilities, ICT tools might be used for information on practicalities (e.g. accommodation, catering, health insurance, life in destination country) and educational guidance.

Guidance practitioners: 1/ first– line practitioners – all educational staff, 2/ second– line practitioners – educational staff with special training (e.g. tutors, coordinators), 3/ third– line practitioners – guidance professionals (guidance psychologists – guidance practitioners) (Watts, Esbroeck, 1998). There are several vocational typologies available in guidance centres, including descriptions of required competences for job positions. Peer

guidance, provided by (trained) peers, has proved effective, too. In regard to mobilities, peer guidance could be provided mainly by mobility ex-participants.

Services according to level of support (provided internally and/ or externally): 1/ guidance² (information-guidance services) – in case a client lacks information for taking a decision, 2/ (psychological) counselling – if a client has problems to take a decision and he needs to clarify his objectives, solve an internal conflict, dilemma and/ or develop his life competences and soft skills, i.e. key competences (in the context of mobilities these might be intercultural competences), 3/ psychotherapy – in case of behaviour and/ or personality disorders or in case of personal crisis (Wiegiersma, 1976).

Current trends include (Sultana, 2007) a shift towards * legal entitlement of guidance services; * focus on EU wide free mobility; * lifelong provision (not only in the key transit periods); * educative framework – focus on career management skills, career decision competences; * targeting groups rather than individuals; * self-service provision where appropriate; * accessibility for everybody and ubiquity – services adjusted to diverse client needs, differentiated for specific target groups such as foreign students; * initial and further services provided by guidance counsellors, trained and experienced in counselling across cultures (which raises need of multicultural training not only in relation to mobilities); * quality management and quality assessment, including competence standards for guidance staff.

² Information and guidance refer to support at rather a general level, i.e. guidance as an integrated specific form of social and personal guidance on life pathway. Based on that, there are also more intensive forms of guidance, often referred to as (psychological) counselling. Guidance and counselling are strongly linked levels of support services. [4].

CURRENT TASKS IN MULTICULTURAL GUIDANCE FOR MOBILITIES

Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility (Recommendation 2006a), as well as its integral part Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers (Recommendation, 2001) put priority on improving quality of mobilities.

Already in its first point, the Quality Charter addresses information and guidance, and also the later points refer to Multicultural Guidance and Counselling – MGC. In relation to students, it states (Recommendation, 2001) that integration into the education system of the hosting country and re-integration into the system of the sending country needs to be improved through academic guidance for students participating in mobilities. The Charter recommends (Recommendation 2006), that students arriving back home from mobilities are provided guidance for using the skills attained through the mobility stay. If needed, there should also be support available to help them re-integrate into the social, educational and professional environment in the home country. The examples listed above are in relation to the multicultural guidance issues. MGC has all the general characteristics of career counselling, as described above, as well as its own specifics.

Definition: MGC is a situation in which two or more persons with different ways of perceiving their social environments are brought together in a helping relationship (Pedersen, 1994); in other words, MGC refers to preparation and practices that integrate multicultural and culture-specific awareness, knowledge and skills into counselling interaction with individuals of different ethnic and cultural origin. (Arredondo et al., 1996) However,

the term multicultural refers not only to various ethnic groups but also to gender issues, different age groups, disabled people, people with different sexual identity etc. (Launikari, 2006).

Objectives, i.e. success dimensions, include: 1/ psychological adaptation to foreign culture, 2/ developing positive opinions and attitudes towards representatives of the foreign culture and 3/ completing study/ working tasks effectively – intercultural competences are recognized as essential to meeting the objectives (Nový, 1996).

Developing intercultural competences for effective life in a different culture and/ or with foreigners aims at improving: * active language skills * social and communication skills, * competences for coping with stress, * social perception in intercultural communication, * cultural relativity awareness, respect, tolerance and reduction of ethnocentrism, * interest in foreign culture and foreigners, * realistic expectations towards foreign culture, and * knowledge about foreign culture.

Thus, intercultural competence means the ability to achieve the goals listed above (Nový, 1996).

The priority of the competence issue has also been underlined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (Recommendation 2006b) and the Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on Intercultural Competences (Council conclusions, 2008). Social and active citizenship competences are one of eight key competence categories identified in the Reference Framework that is attached to the Recommendation (see above). Intercultural competences are included within the same category together with personal and interpersonal competences.

„The particular competences determine all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and, particularly, in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Competences are defined here as a combi-

nation of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context“(Recommendation, 2006b).

INFORMATION ON THE SURVEY OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

The objective. The aim of the survey was to explore how mobility participants perceived the importance of intercultural competences and how they assessed those of their own. Based on a theoretical model (Morgensternová, Šulová, 2007) the authors researched all the three categories of intercultural competences: cognitive competences (“Software of the Mind”), affective competences (perception of experienced situation) and behavioural competences (e.g. communication skills, teamwork competences, and the competence to solve problems in intercultural setting).

The sample. One hundred students from the Technical University in Kosice TUKE in Slovakia were asked to participate in the survey. All the respondents had been chosen from participants in Erasmus mobility stays in the 2009/2010 academic year. Fifty respondents replied and the answers from 42 of them were processed. These include 20 female students (including 1 PhD student) and 22 male students (also including 1 PhD student). The average age of respondents was 22.9 years.

Survey methodology. The respondents were contacted and asked for cooperation through e-mail. The instruction was to scale (from 1 to 5; 1 meaning „very high“, 2 „rather high“, 3 „average“, 4 „rather low“ and 5 „very low“) 23 particular competences from the following aspects: A/ perceived importance of the competence, B/ self-assessment of their own competence level. Each of the particular competences belongs to one of three categories listed above.

The results. For the purpose of the article, two indicators have been figured out: the frequency of answers in which the respondents A/ considered an intercultural competence of high importance; and B/ assessed the own level of a competence (a competence category or a particular competence) rather low or low.

A) IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

Table 1. Perceived importance of the competences by competence categories and gender.

Category/Respondents	Male	Female	Total
Cognitive competences	78,24% (2nd place)	74,81% (2nd place)	76,62% (2nd place)
Affective competences	64,28% (3rd place)	69,29% (3rd place)	66,67% (3rd place)
Behavioural competences	85,10% (1st place)	80,52% (1st place)	82,91% (1st place)
Intercultural competences	77,55%	75,86%	76,75%

Note: The percentage refers to a rate of respondents who scaled intercultural competences as of high or very high importance (1+2 on the scale).

Table 1 indicates that three quarters of the respondents consider intercultural competences important, the male respondents slightly more than the female ones.

Of the three categories of intercultural competences, behavioural competences are perceived as the most important (in men's perception, the importance is higher than in that of women), cognitive competences are in the second place (again of higher importance for men), and affective competences in the third place (higher rate in the perception of the women). Nev-

ertheless, the order of the categories appears to be the same for both genders.

Of the particular competences, the following are considered to be the most important: in the 1st place: „respecting others“, 2nd – 3rd: „intercultural openness and tolerance“ and „perception and correct interpretation of conflict situations“, and 4th – 5th: two related competences: „learning a conflict resolution strategy“ and „understanding own role in a team“. Both genders put higher importance on the skill „respecting others“ (men more than women, 1,19: 1,42 on the scale). As for the male participants, in the 2nd place, there is the competence „perception and correct interpretation of conflict situations“, and in the 3th and 4th places „intercultural openness and tolerance“ and „understanding own role in a team“. In the 2nd – 4th places for the female participants, there are the following competences: „intercultural openness and tolerance“, „adaptability“, and „learning a conflict resolution strategy“.

B) LEVEL OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

Table 2. Self-assessment of one's own competence level by the competence category and gender.

Category/Respondents	Male	Female	Total
Cognitive competences	4,76% (2nd place)	3,82% (3rd place)	4,32% (3rd place)
Affective competences	10,31% (1st place)	4,39% (2nd place)	7,5% (1st place)
Behavioural competences	7,69% (3rd place)	5,79% (1st place)	6,78% (2nd place)
Intercultural competences	7,48%	4,83%	6,23%

Note: The percentage represents a rate of respondents who scaled the level of their own intercultural competence as rather low or very low (4+5 on the scale).

It is significant that the respondents consider affective competences to be of the lowest importance, while, at the same time, they consider their own affective competences as the least developed. In the second place, there are behavioural and, in the third place, cognitive competences. In total, 6,23% of the respondents assess their intercultural competences as weak, with a significant difference between the male and female respondents (7,48% and 4,83%, respectively), which appears in all the three categories. The order is not the same for both genders: the order for men is affective – cognitive – behavioural competences, while that for the women is behavioural – affective – cognitive. Affective competences have been assessed as weak for 10,31% of the men. The women got above the 5% border only in the self-assessment of behavioural competences.

The lowest levels of particular competences have been self-assessed regarding the following competences: 1. ability „to interpret emotions in another culture“, 2. „empathy for other mentalities and their specifics“, 3. „correct understanding of behaviour, in case of a different culture representative“, 4. „non-verbal communication“ and 5. ability „to interpret foreign behavioural patterns correctly“. The female respondents assessed the following of their competences as the least developed: in the 1st – 2nd places: „non-verbal communication“ and “ability to communicate without misunderstandings in communication”; in the 3rd place: „to interpret foreign behavioural patterns correctly“, and the 4th-5th: “learning a conflict resolution strategy” and ability “to interpret emotions in another culture”. The assessments of the male respondents are lower, the lowest figure being for the skills (1. – 2.) „to interpret emotions in another culture“ and „empathy for other mentalities and their specifics“. In the 3rd place there is „gaining knowledge about foreign culture“, in the 4th and 5th „sensitivity towards other culture“ and the competence for „correct understanding of behaviour, in case of a a different culture representative“.

Summary. The survey results indicate that three quarters of the respondents (76,75%) regard intercultural competences as important and only less than two thirds (58,40%) assessing their own competences as good or very good. The competence category they find the least important and, at the same time, the least developed (especially so for men, of whom over 10% find it low), is the category of affective competencies.

In general, the respondents do not consider their particular intercultural competences as very low, but still 7,48% male and 4,83 % female respondents find them rather lowly developed. This indicates that some intercultural (psychosocial) preparation for mobility participants would be definitely suitable.

Intercultural competences, the same as any other competences, can be developed. Training has proved effective in group (as for guidance) or collective (as for information) forms. Suitable alternatives include information-guidance programmes (so-called informative training), which aim at providing relevant information, or psychological-counselling programmes (group counselling and/ or competence training, including intercultural training?) (Zvariková, 2008) Intercultural training is usually divided into the following categories: 1/ culture oriented – focused on improving understanding of typical behaviour patterns in a foreign culture – values, social standards etc., 2/ focused on interaction and communication – direct and structured contact with „culture experts“ from a particular country, including simulations of social and working/study situations, and 3/ so-called intercultural sensitiser (intercultural assimilator) – combination of learning and understanding aspects (Nový, 1996).

CONCLUSION

The European Quality Charter for Mobility (Recommendation, 2006), offers particular recommendations as a reference

tool, with the aim to improve quality of mobilities, thus supporting positive experience of participants both in hosting and sending countries after arrival and back at home. In the Delivering on the modernisation Agenda for Universities: education, research and innovation (Delivering, 2010) it is stated that the rate of students that have studied or had a practical experience placement in industries abroad for at least one trimester or a semester should increase to double at least. All forms of mobility should be recognized as a determinant that enriches study at all levels (including vocational training for doctoral research) and as a positive determinant in career progress of university researchers and staff.

The European Community Green Paper Promoting the learning mobility of young people (Green Paper, 2009) concludes that not all young people understand the benefits of study mobility and also its contribution to personal development and personal employability. The paper identifies a lack of language competences and intercultural knowledge, the same as resistance to leave „home“ (Is this due to the fear of the unknown? Lack of life skills and practical skills?...) as potential barriers. Nevertheless, foreign language skills and intercultural competences widen an individual's professional options, upgrade the skills of the European workforce and are essential elements of genuine European identity.

Multicultural guidance and counselling can contribute to increasing the quality of mobilities by means of individual and group guidance and counselling for arriving foreign students and those leaving. The services could be focused on studies, vocation/ career, personal problems and crises, and should take into consideration knowledge about the hosting country and its cultural specifics (Delivering, 2010) . Augmentative counselling can be fully implemented if also cultural (psychosocial) training is provided beside the language training and guidance on practicalities. Group forms such as intercultural training and

programmes might be provided, and, if needed or on demand, also face-to-face counselling.

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