

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A new and fundamentally different age was already with us long before we entered the new millennium. One of the evident fundamental shifts was from our traditional notion of job and work to a new social contract, yet to be fully defined and understood.

There remains considerable uncertainty and apprehension about the implications of this new social contract. Governments are struggling to prepare a competitive work force for economic stability within global free trade markets. Most industrialized countries are in the throes of massive restructuring. Their social programs and policies, including those related to education and employment services, are now fundamentally different from what we had known and come to expect. Attitudes about the appropriate roles for governments, the responsibilities of citizens for themselves and each other, the roles of the private sector, entitlement and abundance are also undergoing dramatic change.

- What are the implications for the growing career development sector?
- What is the evolving role of professionals in this field?
- What is their role in helping individuals and communities?
- What professional preparation is needed to be proactive and relevant?
- Who are its stakeholders?
- Where and what does it influence?
- How can it be recognized as vital to national and global economies?

Many agree that policy related to the structure and delivery of career development services must undergo radical change in order to lead us successfully into this new era. A number of countries are responding by:

- redefining work within the global labour market;
- recasting the role of career professionals, programs and services;
- restructuring the delivery system for career services;
- exploring quality criteria to evaluate programs and services;
- studying the interrelationship between social, economic and employment policy;
- building bridges between community development and career development; and

- seeking creative ways to help individuals of all ages to navigate the new economy.

The challenges are not country or culture specific. Many people in many countries are experimenting with solutions to common themes and, as a result, there is presently an opportunity to learn from, and be guided by, exemplary practices. There is also an opportunity to build strategies from an international perspective. The International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy was designed to provide such opportunities.

The idea to create such an opportunity and bring together a small, influential, international group with concern and vision for the future of career development was initiated during a New Zealand–Canada visit in 1997. The idea was received enthusiastically by colleagues in the United Kingdom and Australia. Collectively, they agreed to form an organizing committee, and Canada agreed to seek financial support to co-ordinate a think-tank which would endeavour to achieve the following:

- Identify, compare and analyze public policy issues.
- Articulate best (and worst) practices that have both national and international relevance.
- Elaborate the connection between career development and social, economic and labour market policies.
- Draft an international vision for action which:
  - identifies a core set of objectives to forge a broader mainstream vision for the career development sector;
  - elaborates a set of foundation principles for implementing/advancing national action plans;
  - includes key principles underpinning public policy development and the infrastructure to support implementation; and
  - elaborates a set of policies that will provide a framework for the advancement of the provision of guidance/career services.
- Articulate clear outcome statements and strategies with action steps for national attention.
- Establish an active communications network among international partners to sustain dialogue and remain current with progress and results.

The Co-ordinating Committee felt that the term “symposium” more accurately reflected the nature of a session designed to meet the above goals, and the title agreed to was International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy: International Collaboration for National Action. Human Resources Development Canada agreed to fund the organization of the Symposium. The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) agreed to manage and co-ordinate the Symposium. The Government of New Zealand also provided a financial contribution as did the Canada Career Consortium, the Canadian Career Development Foundation, ISM Careerware, National Life/Work Centre and WorkInfoNET. Ottawa, the capital of Canada, was selected as the host city for the meeting. All participants were funded independently for their own travel and accommodation. English and French were the languages for the Symposium.

### **Structure of the Symposium**

The Symposium was held over three full days (including evening sessions), from May 2-4, 1999. It was suggested that country teams be restricted to a maximum of four people and attempt to have an equal mix of policy makers and career development professionals. Those who attended were to be in positions to influence the achievement of one or more of the objectives for the meeting. Individuals, therefore, likely would be in positions of professional leadership or policy formation in key sectors, with responsibility for career development services. All participating countries completed a national focus paper highlighting the best practices and main issues in their country. Authors of the country papers were asked, where possible, to address the following aspects of career development:

- the context;
- underlying principles;
- key policies;
- infrastructure (including legislation in place and needed, organization, development of tools and materials, training, and research); and
- to identify critical current questions needing to be addressed.

Country papers were distributed to all participants in advance so people could come to the meeting prepared for an action agenda.

The Symposium was organized around four themes:

- preparation for the world of work;
- impact on career delivery services of information and communication technologies;
- transitions and lifelong development; and
- foundations of theory.

Internationally acknowledged experts prepared papers in each theme area. The first two days of the Symposium were spent in a combination of short presentations, large group discussions and focus group discussions aimed at tackling prevailing themes and critical issues raised in the country and theme papers. The third day was devoted to planning joint action and identifying steps for implementation.

This volume provides a detailed look at the process and outcomes of the Symposium. It begins with a framework paper that was developed to provide a context for career development and help the authors of country papers focus on the broad domain of career development, rather than a more restrictive perspective. Participants were encouraged to view the term "career" in a very broad way to indicate the lifelong process of managing learning and work. Also, the term "research" was to be interpreted broadly to include unpublished reports, surveys, program development, program evaluation, government publications and discussion papers, as well as formal research studies.

By all reports, the Symposium was an overwhelming success. For many, it was the first time that policy makers and career development professionals had discussed together issues that they both experienced. As a result, professionals obtained a greater appreciation of policy issues and the way policy makers think. In turn, policy makers became more aware of the issues faced by practitioners and the type of policy that could facilitate the professional community meeting the policy makers' goals. In several countries, the Symposium was the catalyst for new initiatives, and many of the action steps outlined in the final chapters of this volume already have been accomplished. The Co-ordinating Committee and participants alike were in agreement that an important start had been made and that we were on the road to international collaboration for national action.

Bryan Hiebert, Editor