

Reflections on the day: Dr Rob Millar, University of Ulster, 29 March 2012

The personal reflection was derived from a broad range of presentations and offered quite a challenge; listening to all speakers a number of phrases, words and ideas emerged and these were summarised as follows:

- 1 careers guidance is often provided **“too late”** and becomes less relevant and certainly less influential
- 2 a number of speakers included **“stories”** in their presentations to offer explanation and clarity; reflects the current trend towards narrative approaches to working with clients
- 3 A phrase included in Patricia’s presentation was **“Together We Can”** – no organisation has to do it alone nor can it do it alone
- 4 In various guises the term **“Investors in People”** was referred to, often through the formal awarding of quality status; maybe this phrase has greater meaning than simply an official organizational award for careers professionals; helping people **invest in themselves** is something careers professionals are acutely aware of promoting.
- 5 Several presenters indicated that despite the adverse circumstances that prevail it is possible to **“make a difference”**
- 6 Perceptions of what careers guidance is and who it is for were raised in a number of presentations; in response to a question one speaker responded by suggesting that **careers guidance was only for people trying to get into the labour market and was not for people who are already in it**; this maybe reflects a public perception that careers guidance is for young people or unemployed adults but not for people currently in employment; there have been criticisms for a number of years that career services have ignored the plight of millions of employees who are suffering as a result of work and those who are required to retire and struggle with this transition.
- 7 There seems to be a need to **“understand situations and contexts”** from the point of view of others; to not make assumptions about what others know or want and to resist the temptation to assume that we, the professionals, know best. Celine posed there key questions in her presentation: are we listening? are we learning? are we changing?

- 8 In Pete's presentation issues were raised around **holistic guidance, boundaries and ethical practice**; strong points of view were expressed (for example, "dangerous") about how far a careers professional goes with a mental health issue; there is probably a relationship with point 7 above. Maybe it is about developing sufficient understanding of the person and their situation to be able to consider what the next steps might be; what is needed and who is best placed to assist. Referral was mentioned – but this is a process based on mutual understanding. If careers services offer different levels and types of guidance (including counselling?) then is there a part of the service that offers assistance to people who are psychologically "in trouble"? If **case-managed clients** are recognized as requiring the most resource intensive level of service delivery, (and they are according to DEL/DENI in the document *Preparing for Success*) who are the people that might fall into this need category? I am thinking that the very people Pete was considering might be appropriate – if not, who helps them? Where do they go for assistance? There is a lack of clarity of thinking around these matters and the controversy is likely to continue for a time yet.