

# **Connecting Policy & Practice: Informing & Influencing Policy Development**

- a case study in Finland 2000 - 2004 <sup>(1)</sup>

A Background paper for a presentation at the Meeting of Education Ministers – Guidance and Counselling, Dublin, 28th & 29 April 2004

Theme: Guidance and Lifelong Learning – Future Directions

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## **Abstract**

The guidance provision in Finland was evaluated in primary, secondary and in tertiary education during 2000 - 2002. The Ministry of Labour evaluated the guidance provision in public employment services during 2001 - 2002. The evaluation for adult education will be completed in during the spring 2004. At the same time Finland also participated in the OECD guidance policy review.

Within the comprehensive and secondary level education the basis of the evaluation was on the goals of career guidance in national curriculum guidelines, educational legislation and other education-related target documents. Within adult and higher education the evaluation process was focusing on the overall functionality of the guidance service from both the students' and the institutions' points of view.

The presentation describes briefly the evaluation processes, the main findings, the recommendations and the national initiatives taken in 2004 to promote guidance provision from lifelong perspective. The focus is on different dimensions in guidance provision and existing tools for the dialogue between policy makers and the guidance community. When the national bodies are taking concrete measures in implementing the lifelong learning strategies, guidance should be described as an integral element of the lifelong guidance process both from policy and practice perspectives. In addition to the definitions of the basic concepts for guidance, the policy statements should identify the sites and settings for guidance in educational institutes and cross-sectoral networks and what functions and tasks it has to fulfil. There is also a need to create more common understanding and communication tools for the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of guidance. Thus, the overall goal of this presentation

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is to identify key questions for consideration how evaluation processes can serve the development of guidance policies and practices on both institutional and national level.

# **1. Brief overview of national arrangements for career information, guidance and counselling services in Finland**

In Finland careers information, guidance and counselling services are provided mainly by two established public service systems: student counselling within the public school system, and the information, guidance and counselling services run by the public labour administration. There is a clear division of labour between these two systems. Schools have the main responsibility for student counselling, with the guidance and counselling services of the employment offices complementing school-based services, being mainly targeted at clients outside the education and training institutions.

## ***Education and training authorities***

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the organisation of guidance and counselling services in comprehensive and upper secondary schools and in higher education. The Ministry of Education draws up the regulations concerning the educational environments and system. The National Board of Education is responsible for the establishment of national curriculum guidelines for the different school subjects, including rules for guidance and counselling and instructions for students' pastoral care in comprehensive and upper secondary schools. Because education has been decentralised, the organisations maintaining educational institutions, usually municipalities, share the responsibility for providing educational services, including making decisions about the amount of resources to be allocated for delivering guidance and counselling services at schools.

Career education is compulsory in grades 7-9, and the new curriculum guidelines require it to be included in the full basic education. The focus is on advising pupils on course selection and providing guidance on further studies and career choices. At upper secondary schools the student counsellors and personal tutors are jointly responsible for vocational and educational guidance and counselling. The curricula include lessons, which are dealing with issues related to careers guidance. The practitioners provide also group counselling and individual counselling. Most of the guidance practitioners, student counsellors, are qualified teachers with one year's specialised training in addition to their teacher education.

Counselling at vocational institutes is more closely integrated with the general curriculum than in comprehensive or upper secondary school. All teachers provide careers guidance, only a small proportion of counselling is provided in separate lessons. A specialised student counsellor is responsible for personal counselling in most institutes.

The higher education institutes (HEIs) provide guidance services for the students and applicants. The organisation of these services varies in different institutions. Usually, student affairs office offers information, advice and counselling on studies, practical training, and Open University courses. A special financial aid office deals with student welfare services. Career centres offer career counselling, job search training, and information on vacancies and employers for students close to completing their studies. Career services are also available from joint WWW-pages of career services centres. Faculties and departments usually offer services of a student affairs secretary who is responsible for planning, co-ordinating and developing tutoring, training tutors and editing study guides. Teachers, the student affairs office, the student unions and the Health Service professionals also play roles in the provision and delivery of guidance and counselling in HEIs. (CIMO, 2003).

## **2. Evaluation of guidance provision in Finland 2001 - 2003**

In late 1990s the policy makers of higher education sector in Finland started to pay attention to the prolonged study times and the length of transition from education to the labour market. Complexity of choices facing young people in education and employment stems not only from changes in jobs and career patterns, but also from the growing flexibility of the pathways from education to working life. According to the Finnish strategies on education for 1999 – 2004 the aim is large-scale pedagogical renewal towards student-centred teaching methods. Teaching, guidance and advisory services will be developed to support progress in studies and to shorten graduation times (Ministry of Education, 1999).

In order to support the implementation of these strategies, the National Board of Education and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) launched parallel processes for evaluating guidance provision nationally from comprehensive education to higher education in 2000–2002. The following chapters briefly describe the results of these evaluations.

### ***Evaluation of guidance services in Higher Education***

The national evaluation of career guidance services (Moitus & al, 2001; Moitus & Vuorinen, 2003) in Finnish universities and polytechnics in 2000 – 2001 was carried out by The FINHEEC. The initiative for the evaluation was expressed by the national student union of polytechnic students. As a whole the students had a very active role within the evaluation. The evaluation process was focusing both on the overall functionality of the services and the services for students in different phases of the individual learning program. The same questionnaire was sent both the students and the staff members. The questions were focusing on how the guidance services meet the students' needs during the different phases of individual learning pathway in higher education. Additionally, the institutes were asked to identify how they monitor the need

and demand for guidance services, how they define the institutional policies in the service delivery, how they organise and evaluate their services and what is the role of key stake holders in the overall service delivery. In addition to the questionnaire, a national external evaluation team visited ten institutes.

According to the results the Finnish higher education institutes provide many good quality career services for students, but there seems to be a lack of coherent overall institutional planning of the services. For example, the potentials of already existing ICT applications and technology were not fully utilized, because some of the applications were established to meet the needs only of a certain individual body within the institution. Additionally, the services did not always meet the demand and needs of individual students. Due to the lack of coherent institutional strategies, guidance provision across higher education and even within individual institutions and faculties was very variable in quality and quantity, and often unevenly distributed.

According to the external evaluation team the key issue in improving this situation was the development of institutional policies which define the goals of guidance, the entitlements and responsibilities of staff and students, in the context of the particular mission and structures of the institution. Additionally, the basic guidance skills should be integrated within the institutional staff development programs.

One year from the publication of the results, in summer 2002, FINHEEC collected feedback on the evaluation from the institutions which participated in the evaluation. They were requested to assess how the evaluation had benefited their institution, to describe the measures taken following the evaluation. According to their comments, the evaluation helped to understand the whole student guidance process and it revealed the deficiencies in student guidance. The participants particularly liked the method, since it contributed to co-operation between the staff and students. However, many HEIs thought that implementing all the recommendations would be a large task.

### ***Evaluation of guidance services in comprehensive and secondary level education***

The National Board of Education conducted evaluation of study guidance in comprehensive and secondary level education in 2002 (Numminen & al, 2002). In the evaluation, attention was also paid to study guidance in transitional stages, i.e. when moving 1) from the sixth to the seventh grade of basic school, 2) from comprehensive school to upper secondary school and vocational education and 3) from secondary education to work or further education.

The evaluation was based on the Board of Education's model of evaluation concerning productivity of education (1988), and its bases are the goals concerning study guidance in curricula, educational legislation and other education-related target documents. In the evaluation, the most central viewpoints of study guidance were the guidance of personal growth and development, the guidance on study skills, the guidance of vocational orientation and the guidance to further education, the availability of study guidance, study guidance in transitional stages of education and prevention of drop outs. The evaluation contained inquiries and interviews, which were conducted on pupils/students of comprehensive school,

upper secondary school and vocational education (N = 8 147), tutors (N = 502), principals (N = 460) and organisers of education (N = 138) and administrative boards and parents of comprehensive school pupils (N = 4 050).

The evaluation revealed *a growing need and demand for study guidance*, which is a result of changes in working life as well as factors that have increased the flexibility of the school system and the individuality of studies. On the basis of the evaluation, there were deficiencies in the availability of study guidance: not all the pupils/students receive the personal guidance or support they need in their studies and development. There were not enough counsellors to meet the increased demand. According to the results the students got information how to apply to secondary or tertiary education but less current labour market information. The focus of the career education programmes was on completion of programmes not so much transitional issues from life long learning perspective.

### **3. Initiatives generated by the results of national evaluations on guidance provision**

Every fourth year, the Government adopts a Development Plan for Education and University Research. The new plan covers the period from 2003 to 2008. It includes the key qualitative, structural and quantitative objectives in education and research, as well as the principles for developing student financial aid. The starting point for the development plan is the realisation of basic security in education. The aim is to prevent social exclusion and to intervene at an early stage to secure basic rights throughout the entire education system. Current priorities include the improvement of the effectiveness of the education system, support and guidance for children and young people, promotion of adult education opportunities and research activities. Thus, during this period 2003-2008 the Ministry of education allocates funding for national and regional initiatives to meet the challenges identified in the evaluations described in previous chapters.

#### ***Initiatives in Higher Education***

As a most significant result of the evaluation in higher education, the Ministry of Education invited all universities to draw up development strategies for basic degrees and for studies, in which guidance plays an important part. In the target outcome negotiations conducted in spring 2002, guidance was one of the themes discussed with all the universities. According to the target outcome contracts in 2003, universities were allocated special project funding for the development of guidance services. According to the current national strategy the universities must implement system which ensures the students support in creating and monitoring their individual study plans. Guidance has also been discussed in corresponding negotiations with polytechnics.

### *Initiatives in comprehensive and secondary education*

In December 2003 the National Board of Education launched a significant national initiative to promote the implementation of the new national curriculum guidelines. The initiative works in partnership with existing parallel national projects which are focusing on holistic services in adult education and social inclusion in the transition from comprehensive education to secondary education. The other goal is also to coordinate regional cross-sectoral activities and share experienced and good practices created in these projects. The national initiative is a network of 70 regional sub-projects.

At the end of 2003 the National Board of Education executed the new national guidelines for guidance provision and career education for the comprehensive and upper secondary level general education. The new curriculum guidelines describe the overall goals of guidance and the minimum level of the content of the career education curricula. Additionally the municipalities are required to provide a strategic and operational plan for the guidance provision and the regular evaluation of services. The curriculum guidelines form a framework for delivering guidance and counselling services in different educational settings according to the holistic approach. Student counsellors have the main responsibility for delivering guidance and counselling, and group advisers are responsible for tutoring their own designated group of students. Furthermore, each teacher is responsible for guiding the students in study skills and in supporting the growth and development of the students. The headmaster of the school is responsible for organising teaching and counselling facilities so that different counselling methods can be taken in use and different ways of producing guidance and counselling services can be realised.

The basic goals of the curriculum guidelines for guidance and counselling are:

- (a) To support personal growth and development of the students,
- (b) To promote the development of study skills and to help in learning difficulties,
- (c) To counsel and guide the students in educational and occupational orientation.

The background theory for the new curriculum guidelines is socio-constructivist learning and counselling theory. The students are subjects and autonomous learners who need guidance and counselling in developing their study skills and planning their life career. The new curriculum guidelines emphasize the skills to learn to use different sources of information, especially computer-literacy and use of Internet. One of the indicators of effective guidance and counselling services is that the students have enough tools for making relevant decisions in transition phases of their study path. This means that they have enough information about educational opportunities, they have learnt by experience what the working life is like and they have knowledge on different occupations and labour market trends.

Within guidance delivery different counselling methods should be used in a flexible way. In spite of having counselling lessons, students should have enough individual and small group counselling. Counsellors are encouraged to learn to use web-based counselling as a tool to teach students for individual working skills.

The guidance and counselling services in different educational settings are seen as a process which prepares students for transitions and the future's society and gives students tools for life long learning. This means that the whole study path from comprehensive school to the secondary education and to working life or further education should be taken into consideration when writing local strategies for guidance and counselling services. These strategies should include descriptions of cooperation is between educational stages, for example, when students move from comprehensive education to upper secondary education. The local curricula should define the organization of different follow-up systems. As a whole, these guidelines promote regional and institutional networks among counsellors and teachers in different educational settings.

Multi-professional cooperation is defined by the new legislation for students' pastoral care in comprehensive and secondary education. The same legislation emphasises that the schools are obliged to write strategies for the cooperation between school and home, as well. Thus, the active role of parents is further promoted in Finnish school system by the legislation taken in use in the beginning of August 2003.

The new curriculum guidelines are more detailed and more instructive than the previous guidelines. The aim is to guarantee for every student guidance and counselling services of high quality and that every student gets guidance and counselling when he or she needs either support in daily school work or in making decisions dealing with her/his future life.

In addition to the new guidelines the National Board of Education (NBE) has also made the following national initiatives to promote guidance policies and practices (Table 1). In order to provide support for the institutions how to evaluate the implementation of the initiatives the National Board of Education has launched a web-based service (<http://www.edu.fi>) for the institutional evaluation of guidance and counselling services on comprehensive and secondary level. Another strong strategic initiative is to embed guidance policy issues in national in-service training programs for principals and school administration personnel.

*Table 1: National initiatives to promote guidance provision in Finland 2003*

<b>Target</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Evaluation of guidance provision.	Development of criteria and methodology.	NBE: National Web-based support for institutional evaluation.
Basic guidance skills of teachers	Training on basic guidance skills and essence of guidance services.	NBE: In-service training for teachers in guidance issues.
Management skills of the principals, knowledge on guidance	Holistic approach and understanding of guidance goals and services	NBE: in-service training of school principals.
Guidance services for students with special needs.	Training for guidance professionals in skills to meet students with special needs. Skills for cross-sectoral co-operation.	NBE: In-service training for student counsellors. European Agency: Project From school to work.

Network of regional consultants.	Development of national network of regional consultants. Additionally frequent mentoring for the existing network. (The first 30 consultants were already trained in 2001 – 2002 and the second group over 30 consultants started in training in August 2003.)	NBE: training and mentoring of regional consultants (student counsellors).
Guidance in transition phases	Guidance in transition phases will be developed by means of cross-sectoral co-operation.	NBE: in-service training of principals, guidance professionals and teachers. National joint expert group.
ICT skills among practitioners	National 3-level in-service training programme for practitioners. Web-based support for practitioners in applying ICT within guidance.	NBE: National 3-level training programme for practitioners

#### **4. Existing tools for the dialogue between policy and practise**

A very strong message from the evaluations of guidance policies is a need for more common understanding on guidance and communication tools between guidance policy and practise. The following chapters illustrate some existing national tools to promote this dialogue.

Since 1980's there has been an active national forum in guidance, with a mandate from the ministries of education and of labour and with a broad membership including the social partners. The group has representatives from both ministries, National Board of Education, professional organisations, regional labour and educational administration, student organisations and social partners. It has been acting as a national forum and has given proposal to improve the national guidance policies. In addition to the overall guidance provision it has been focusing on the issues related to transition from comprehensive education to secondary education and also transition from education to labour market.

In November 2002 The Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä together with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and National Board of Education hosted a national seminar of 250 delegates entitled: "The future of guidance and counselling in Finland 2002 - 2012? - A national seminar on policies for Information, Guidance and Counselling". The goal of the seminar was to summarise the results of the national parallel evaluations on guidance provision and promote further discussions on guidance policies in the

next national strategy for education and research 2003 – 2008. This initiative had parallel goals and also further linkages with the OECD activity on guidance policies and the International symposia on career development and public policy which were held in Canada in 1999 (Hiebert & Bezanson, 2000) and 2001. The next national seminar will be arranged in November 2004.

The communication among the practitioners and policy makers can be promoted also by Internet-based resource centres. There are already examples of these type of services like the Counsellor Resource Centre in Canada, (<http://www.crccanada.org>). Recently CEDEFOP launched their guidance web-pages at: <http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/>. This site provides policy documents and findings of the recent evaluations on guidance policies. In Finland a parallel service (<http://www.asiantuntijaluotsi.net>) aims to coordinate national networks in guidance and to support the professional development of their members. Another goal is to strengthen cooperation between different bodies and sectors of government in the field of guidance. The service provides currently tools for sharing policy documents among policy leaders and practitioners. It provides also materials for local policy decisions and hosts mailing lists and discussion groups for national and regional purposes. One of the new features will be a national data base of guidance providers. The interface of this service will be updated by the end of 2004.

#### ***A new communication tool: Dimensions of guidance provision***

The evaluations of counselling and guidance services revealed that there is a need for stronger strategic planning and leadership in the guidance delivery. The following model (Hakulinen & Kasurinen, 2002; Kasurinen & Vuorinen, 2003) promotes congruence between the strategic planning and the implementation of guidance services. The aim is to illustrate the transparency of services both for decision makers and the various service providers. In this model guidance can be seen as a chain of services. The responsibilities of different providers can be described in different layers. It also provides a platform to generate common concepts for different stakeholders and social partners. As a whole, it provides one framework to make the best use of existing resources to meet the demand of guidance services and the needs from different client groups during the different phases of an individual lifelong learning process. The model can be used as a framework in developing guidance and counselling services in different educational settings. The overall guidance provision can be described in seven dimensions and parallel strategic questions:

*Contextual dimension* - National decision making and policy on guidance and counselling issues, legislation, national curriculum guidelines, etc. (Why does guidance matter for public policy?).

*Systemic dimension* - Description of the contexts, development of the local and schools' curricula, to what extent individual programmes are possible, how institutions support the individuals, how the teaching is organised etc. (What are the settings and mechanisms for decision-making on guidance policies?).

*Time dimension* - Guidance services during different phases of the individual lifelong learning process, primary education – secondary level education – tertiary education – adult education. (When do different client group need specific guidance services?).

*Content dimension* - Marketing, information, guidance by means of different communication channels and methods, and the focus of the counselling practice during different phases of the individual study path. (What is the content of lifelong guidance services?).

*Area dimension* - Psycho-social support, personal guidance, career guidance, educational guidance. (What is the role of different guidance providers within cross-sectoral networks?).

*Responsibility dimension* - There must be regional plans, which describe the areas of responsibilities for staff members producing guidance and counselling services in different phases of the individual's life span. (Who is in charge of the overall design of cross-sectoral regional and national co-operation?).

*Methodological dimension* - Description of the methods and facilities, which are in use and how these methods are used. (How are the services produced in order to meet the needs of various client groups?).

This model allows variations of the service delivery modes. It also helps to illustrate the services which can be seen by the users and the mechanisms which are directing and managing the delivery of the services. These mechanisms are not always visible and we could speak about the eighth dimension: factors directing strategic planning and realisation of the services in national and local level.

The model can be modified into a matrix and be completed in more details by the various stakeholders and social partners in institutional and regional levels. The time during transitional phases is also included in the model in educational settings. Each year the organisations participating the regional cross-sectoral guidance community should evaluate how they have managed to reach the goals settled for guidance and counselling and after that plan again how guidance services will be organised in the following year.

Figure 1: A matrix for connecting guidance policy & practise (Kasurinen, 2003)

F a c t o r s  b e h i n d  d e c i s i o n  m a k i n g	<b>Time dimension</b> (When?)	<b>Comprehensive education</b>	<b>Secondary education</b>	<b>Higher education</b>	<b>Working life</b>	<b>Adult education</b>
	<b>Contextual dimension</b> (Framework)					
	<b>Systemic dimension</b> (Where?)					
	<b>Area dimension</b> (What)	<b>Multi-professional expert groups?</b>				
	<b>Responsibility dimension</b> (Who?)	<b>Cooperation?</b>				
	<b>Content dimension</b> (What?)	<b>Transition? Follow-up?</b>				
	<b>Methodological dimension</b> (How?)					

## 5. Conclusions

When national bodies are taking concrete measures in implementing the lifelong learning strategies, guidance should be described as an integral element of the lifelong guidance process both from policy and practice perspectives. In addition to the definitions of the basic concepts for guidance, the policy statements should identify the sites and settings for guidance in educational institutes and cross-sectoral networks and what functions and tasks it has to fulfil. There is also a need to create more common understanding and language on the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of guidance.

Legislation can provide framework how to guarantee access to guidance services for the clients, but the practitioners have also a crucial role how to design relevant services and programmes in meeting the increased demand of various client groups. These findings should have implications in the training of guidance practitioners. In addition to the competencies and qualifications related to guidance methodology the training should focus also on the competencies related to the evaluation and strategic planning of the guidance services in different settings.

In addition to national policy seminars jointly developed Internet-based virtual communities or resource centres can also be applied in promoting more coherent national and regional

strategies for cross-sectoral co-operation. In decentralised systems there is a strong need to benchmark good practises in regional and institutional guidance provision. The practitioners need also learning environments for maintaining and developing their professional expertise and promoting regional guidance policies. A common web-based platform could strengthen cooperation between different bodies and sectors of government in the field of guidance.

As a whole, national guidance forums could act as the most sustainable options for the strategic co-ordination of career guidance services - including both co-ordination across government sectors and co-ordination between governments and other stakeholders. According to the transnational evaluations there are many good examples of these forums. In addition to the national activities these type of coordinating bodies have a lot of potential in sharing expertise and experience on policy and practise dialogue also on transnational level.

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