



## POLICY BRIEFING NOTE: 12

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*Following our publication of PBN 6 in which we highlighted some aspects of careers guidance in Finland, we are delighted to make available here a specially prepared PBN from our colleague in Finland.*

### Guidance in Finnish Schools: Some Elements Relevant to Current Developments in England

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**1. Guidance as a student entitlement:** In 2011 the Ministry of Education and Culture endorsed new legislation on the allocation of hours to different subjects in comprehensive education. The committee preparing this act consulted a great number of stakeholders and social partners. The outcome was that career education remains as a compulsory element in the curriculum, comprising 76 hours of scheduled activities in students' timetables during classes 7-9. In addition, there is an entitlement for individual guidance and group counselling, and work-experience periods. In grades 1-6, guidance is embedded in the work of the classroom teachers.

**2. Professionalism:** The parliamentary committee on education has agreed a recommendation for a ratio of 250 students per counsellor (the national association of practitioners and the teachers' trade union recommended a ratio of 1:200). This is to guarantee the entitlement for individual counselling. The qualifications and competences of school counsellors are regulated: either a Master's degree in school counselling or a 60 ECTS postgraduate diploma is required.

**3. National core curricula; local networked implementation:** The core curricula mention that the principles and division of labour among the different players in guidance and counselling activities are to be defined locally. The curriculum must include a description of how co-operation with the local labour market and business community is being implemented within the school. Classroom visits by labour market representatives, visits to workplaces, project work, the use of different sectors' information materials and introduction-to-working-life periods are central parts of this co-operation. The instruction in the different subjects is to include modules that connect the knowledge and skills provided by the subject to the demands and possibilities of working life.



The emphasis is on the promotion of career management skills, not only on the choice of next school level.

Pupils and their parents are to have the chance to receive information on the working approaches and possibilities of choice within basic education, and on the implications of these choices for the pupil's studies and future. School-specific issues concerning the provision of guidance and counselling services, pupil welfare and support services are to be explained to pupils and their parents or guardians. The parent or guardian must be given opportunities to discuss issues related to the pupil's studies and choices by meeting collectively with the teacher, study counsellor and pupil.

The latest development in legislation requires also a municipality-level body to be responsible for cross-ministerial and cross-sectoral local co-operation in meeting the needs of youth under 25 years of old. This was before the introduction in January 2013 of a social guarantee for young people, requiring that each person younger than 25 years and each recent graduate under 30 years of age be offered work, a traineeship, or a study, workshop or labour market rehabilitation place within three months of becoming unemployed. This requires even stronger collaboration between local organisations, to ensure that guidance services meet the challenges posed by the guarantee.

**4. Revision of the core curriculum and national quality criteria 2014:** The National Board of Education has started a process to update the national core curricula by the end of 2014 and a group has been designated to write the minimum content and supporting materials for this. This work will build on the previous core curricula. In the current version, career education is described as a mainstream strategy and a responsibility of all staff, and the goals and content of the 76 hours and individual guidance are outlined. There is also a requirement for a school-level plan of career education and guidance with allocation of tasks to different staff members.

We have had guidance as a responsibility of schools at different levels and the responsibility of the transition phases has been an issue. This is now under development and the local authorities have built mechanisms to create new means for promoting co-operation between the different providers and how to extend the responsibilities/possibilities for cross-sectoral and multi-professional local co-operation. The issue of impartiality comes on to the agenda when the discourse shifts from a supplier-driven approach to a user/citizen perspective.

In order to support the implementation of the new core curricula, the National Board of Education will produce quality criteria for career education and guidance services in schools by the end of 2014.



**5. Evidence-based practice and policy development:** Feedback mechanisms have been developed for different levels of education. After an evaluation in 2002, the tools used in the evaluation were converted to an online self-evaluation programme for schools to have annual barometers of their performance. These were used in some larger cities to target resource allocation, but without national reference data. For example, the city of Tampere in central Finland (about 215,000 inhabitants) has used this tool and its updated versions in 2004, 2008 and 2012. In 2005 the city allocated 6 additional full-time school counsellors to meet the increased need identified in the evaluation. In addition, a city-level cross-sectoral working group was established to improve the services during the transition phase from comprehensive school to secondary education. Tampere currently has one of the highest enrolment percentages of the age cohort entering the secondary level.

In 2010 the National Board of Education funded a project to update the online tools to meet the changes in the existing provision. There were five pilot municipalities (both urban and rural) which tested the new online tools. As an outcome of this pilot, the questionnaires for students, parents and school staff members were validated and developed in paper format.

In general, the municipalities are required to evaluate their own performance in education annually and guidance is part of this process. So, many schools are doing it, but the next challenge is to get consistent national data. The national association of schools counsellors carry also their own surveys and give feedback to policy makers. The new contractual (salary) arrangements include annual performance negotiations at school level between the school leaders and the guidance practitioners.

Because the role of parents, students and companies are mentioned in the core curricula, the self-evaluation of school implies that schools collect feedback from the parents as well. As necessary, the parents or guardians must be given a chance to discuss key issues with the school counsellor and the various pupil welfare experts. At national level there is no legal requirement that feedback should be collected from parents, because the responsibility for how to organise the self-evaluation is at municipality level, and there is no consistent data available to what extent municipalities collect data from parents. However, there are projects (like the tools for guidance) which include questionnaires for parents.

When schools evaluate the effectiveness of the work-experience periods, they collect data from employers. There are also pilots in collecting this cumulative data using mobile devices in addition to the PC-based online tools.

The student unions conduct annual studies on the provision and their feedback gets a lot of publicity. Guidance is also referenced in the annual studies on student well-being and in the youth barometer of the national employer organisations.



**6. Post-school developments:** Since the beginning of 2013 Finland has been focusing on regional and cross-sectoral development of guidance provision linked to employment and education priorities, supported by co-operation on lifelong learning. The development, design and implementation of guidance services will be compiled by 15 regional authorities, ELY Centres (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment), which all have established regional lifelong guidance forums. The quality assurance of the LLG provision is one of the tasks given to the ELY Centres. This work is co-ordinated by a governmentally designated national working group. This group has its mandate from both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. The first phase of this working group was 2010-11. In March 2011 the group launched a national strategy for LLG for both sectors covering the years 2012-16. This working group was extended to follow up the implementation of the strategy and to act as the Steering Group for national level development programmes for guidance during this starting ESF period.

The group has about 30 representatives from the following organisations: both ministries, Ministry of Social Services and Health, National Board of Education, national employer organisation, sectoral councils, key trade unions, national association of municipalities, youth organisations, student organisations, voluntary sector, practitioner association, ELY Centres, training units of practitioners, research centres, and the Euroguidance centre. It is co-chaired by the ministries.

At the moment the working group acts as an advisory board for national guidance policy development and promotes cross-sectoral co-operation between the different policy fields. The working group has sub-groups for specific themes, which prepare proposals for the whole group meetings. The Ministry of Education and Culture has designated to the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä a national task force to collect and conduct research which can support the national and regional policy development. This is integrated in the contract between the ministry and the University. The Institute has organised a national online centre of lifelong guidance expertise and acts as a clearing house of research and good practice.

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