



POLICY BRIEFING NOTE: 6

This is the sixth of a series of short Policy Briefing Notes published by Careers England.

LESSONS TO LEARN FROM FINLAND AND SWEDEN - CAREER GUIDANCE?

1. **Sweden's** education system used to attract the most attention from UK educators but the ground has shifted as Sweden's relative performance has failed to improve significantly in recent years. Sweden also espouses 'free schools' which many on the left reject out of hand. **Finland though is different.**
2. In PISA tables, Finland rates highly on both performance and equity metrics. It also administers a comprehensive school system, with teaching a high status profession.
3. And, interestingly, Finland accepts just how important careers advice and guidance is. **Careers guidance and counselling is, in fact, part of the curriculum in every school.** In principle, pupils have three options after compulsory schooling (Lower Secondary): (a) continue to upper secondary schooling (51%); (b) go the upper secondary vocational route (42%), or (c) find employment. High quality careers guidance quickly became a cornerstone of lower and upper secondary school.
4. Pasi Sahlberg, the well-known commentator on Finland's education system, says that good careers guidance and counselling in schools '*has been an important factor in explaining low grade repetition and dropout rates in Finland*'. Sahlberg adds that '*Careers guidance has also acted as an important bridge between formal education and the world of work. As part of the overall career guidance curriculum each student in Peruskolou spends at least two weeks in a selected work place*'.
5. And in Finland they have an **Annual Careers Guidance Plan** as a requirement for all schools - as recommended here by the House of Commons Education Select Committee, but thus far rejected by DfE.
6. In Sweden, by contrast, decentralisation in the 1990s led to many municipalities devolving decisions on the nature of provision to schools, which has resulted in erosion of specialist professional guidance roles. Whereas Sweden used to be viewed as having the strongest guidance system in Scandinavian countries, it is now widely viewed as the weakest.

Note: In the Finnish school system *Peruskolou* is the 9-year period spent in comprehensive school, starting aged 7 years. For more information, please see:

<http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2012/Sahlbergq.pdf>

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Prepared by Patrick Watson, Montrose Public Affairs Consultants Ltd & Professor Tony Watts