



Lisbeth Højdal
LIH@cvustork.dk

Denmark

II.2.1 General questions

II.2.1.1 Characteristics and particular problems of the guidance and counselling system in Denmark

Since the 70s the main discussion related to young people transitions from school to work has focused on how to reduce the size of the so-called "remainder group", which is the expression used for those who do not complete any education or training after compulsory education¹. This has caused a number of educational reforms which, among other things, have been aimed at making the youth education system more flexible, inclusive and individualised. The individualised pathways that are now created in the education system challenges the guidance and counselling system to become equally flexible and individualized.

Up till now research projects and policy papers has provided different explanations as to why some young people becomes part of the „remainder group“. The problem has been described as structural – e.g. that it arises from the lack of practical training places in the vocational education system or unequal access to education and/or vacant jobs². But it has also been described as problems deriving from individual factors – e.g. that some individuals lack specific competences that would allow them to gain access to education and – hereby – to the job market³.

Likewise, the guidance system has undergone comprehensive reforms in recent years, with the objective to make it consistent with the needs of this target group and, at the same time, more adjusted to challenges which derives from the individualised education system. Today the guidance services are obliged to target the young people who are in the most need of guidance – and related services as for example mentors and contact teachers are obliged to cooperate across different sectors and/or institutions to provide support for these young people.

II.2.1.2. Typically used instruments, procedures and approaches in guidance and counselling in Denmark

Since 1993 when the Minister of Education launched a comprehensive set of initiatives called „Education for All“ (UTA), the compulsory schools in Denmark have been obligated to integrate a number of topics related to the labour market, into the general school curriculum. Though not an independent subject like for example mathematics, the topic „Educational and

¹ From Initial Education to Working Life. OECD 2001

² Hansen, Erik Jørgen. 2003

³ Bertel Haarders åbningstale. Sorø mødet. 2007 (Speech given by the Minister of Education)



vocational orientation”⁴ as it is called, now has to be an integrated part of the school subjects or of the general curriculum.

In addition to being taught labour market topics, pupils in compulsory schools take part in study visits at local/regional trades and industries, e.g. visits to local farms. From the age 12-13 the pupils are furthermore entitled to one week’s placement in a company of their own choice in order to get hands-on experience from the world of work. Additionally, the oldest pupils in compulsory schools attend various bridge-building courses which aims at building bridges between compulsory schools and various courses at secondary education level.

Students at general secondary level of education – depending on the particular course – receive lessons in general labour market issues such as the labour markets structure and functioning. Students at vocational upper secondary level can – also depending on the specific course – participate in projects related to the labour market. These vary a lot in both scope and content but could be projects like: „Create our own business“, or „Develop a waste-disposal plan for the Municipality of xxx“. In all cases, the purpose of these projects is to allow students to get a glimpse at the real world of work – e.g. how different types of work are organised, and the economic and structural functioning of trades and industries.

The above mentioned examples do not reflect a particular theoretical approach to career guidance. The main emphasis is to provide children and young people with information, e.g. on labour market structure and functioning and the peculiarities of different trades, crafts and industries.

II.2.1.3. Characteristics of newer approaches in guidance

Youth guidance has been one of the tools in the fight against youth unemployment since 1982. It constitutes an obligation for the municipalities to follow up on all young people, who are not enrolled in youth education or who are not employed at the labour market. As described in the first Danish Country Report⁵ the Danish guidance system has undergone a number of changes in recent years, including establishing local and regional guidance centres.

In the new centres, as well as in the compulsory and secondary schools the characteristics of newer approaches to guidance are:

- A closer follow-up on young people in and out of the education system
- Establishing new „help-functions“ – e.g. mentors
- Special attention to appointed target groups – e.g. ethnic minorities⁶

⁴ Uddannelses-, Erhvervs- og Arbejdsmarkedsorientering. UVM 1993

⁵ First Country Report Denmark

⁶ Ny Chance til alle. Integrationsministeriet



II.2.2. Working group: Benchmarks

II.2.2.1. Criteria's for measuring changes in guidance and counselling – Benchmarks to measure the development of the guidance system

Following the goals and objectives formulated by the Government when implementing the new guidance system, possible quality criterias could be:

- Visibility and easy access to guidance in all levels of education, during transitions from school to work and between jobs
- Coherence and progression in guidance that takes place in different parts of the guidance system
- An increased number of a youth cohort enrolled in both secondary and upper secondary education
- A decrease in the numbers of student drop out and a decrease in the number of early school leavers

From a career theory perspective quality indicators could be that guidance provision:

- Contributes to widen the individual's perspective on choices at hand (e.g. by working with self-images and identity issues) and enhances individuals' career opportunities (e.g. by focusing on the individuals strengths rather than weaknesses)
- Helps individuals to identify personal goals and equip them with the means to reach them⁷
- Contributes to remove socially constructed barriers that exist in individuals' possibilities in making free and equal career choices⁸

II.2.2.2 Indicators and benchmarks to evaluate the results of school and learning activities

From the dominating political perspective the main objectives within teaching and training (and guidance) is to supply the labour market with a workforce equipped with competencies relevant to both present and future market demands. Thus, an objective in career guidance is to help individuals make choices that are „realistic“ and matches both the needs of society and the needs, desires and resources that he or she has⁹. From an individual perspective, choosing an education can have a wider scope than just the narrow here-and-now job perspective. And choosing a specific job can connect different types of intentions to the individual. For example, it can be intended to be something that one only wants to do temporarily because one, at the moment, is occupied with other things than career issues.

⁷ Lent et al. 2002

⁸ Savickas, 2002

⁹ The National Act on Educational and Vocational Guidance



Depending on who is to judge the success possible benchmarks could be:

- Balance between the supply and demand side at the labour market
- An education system that matches both present and future needs for qualifications
- A reduction in the drop out rates in youth education – especially the dropout that takes place in practice periods in companies
- Equal access to a variety of different careers and career paths
- Gaining job satisfaction, e.g. being able to balance life and work

II.2.2.3. Criteria's for measuring changes for the better – Benchmarks used to evaluate the guidance provision

According to the reform in the educational and vocational guidance both the youth guidance centres (UU) and the regional centres (Studievalg) are obligated to report results (quantitative figures) to the local and/or central authorities. The most commonly used benchmarks are factors connected to young people' enrolment in an educational setting and/or student activity and drop out. There are no registered evaluations that directly link specific guidance approaches to outcomes – e.g. initiatives that creates decision making skills or enduring interests or the „quality“ of the choices that are made.

II.3 Recommendations – topics for discussion

Regarding the more general issues concerning guidance approaches targeted towards young people' transitions from school to work, the following issues might need further discussion:

- How guidance is closely connected to the current educational policy and/or issues connected to labour allocation - and what influence that has on the individual approach
- How to balance the approach „special services to appointed target groups“ and the objective to individualise the service provision
- The importance of scheduled lessons in careers education and methods and strategies to follow up on the activities involved – e.g. job placement
- The professionalisation of guidance practitioners – versus involving several different help-services in guidance (e.g. untrained mentors)

Regarding relevant benchmarks to evaluate guidance some general issues connected to the understanding of guidance and guidance related goals seem important – like these:

- How to create coherence in the service provision with many different stakeholders with diverse conceptions of what guidance actually is
- How to measure progression in guidance – e.g. that students gain more insights about themselves and the world of work, or learn different approaches to decision making
- How society goals and objectives in guidance are being balanced with individual goals



III. Working Group: School

III.2.1. Competences and qualifications that young people need to enter the labour market

As mentioned earlier it is difficult to generalise on competence demands on the labour market. Inspired by various career theorist the following key competencies are important when taking the first step into the world of work:

- The ability to judge yourself in vocational terms – e.g. knowledge about your values, resources, goals and priorities (picture of yourself)
- The ability to foresee what choosing a specific job might indicate – e.g. the specific work role (picture of the future¹⁰)
- The ability to „read“ and/or meet present and changing demands at the workplace – e.g. the specific performance demands, business values and attitudes (understanding of the actual demands)

III.2.2. Strategies used to assist young people in becoming ‘work ready’

As described earlier pupils in compulsory schools are being taught in topics related to the world of work as well as study trips to local businesses are made by the schools. Also the „Bridge-building-courses“ mentioned earlier are activities that aim at learning more about the life after compulsory school. Most of these activities focus on gaining information about different lines of work

The most important activity to help pupils get a hands-on experience from the world of work is the „in-company training“ of 1-2 weeks duration, which they are entitled to participate in at the upper grades of compulsory education. The vocational education system is organised as a sandwich type of education which alters between school periods and practical training at the company. In this way the student also gets a „real- life experience“ about what it means to be working as a skilled worker. In some of the courses at upper secondary level students participate in „on the job training“ for some shorter periods of the course.

III.2.3 How should learning processes be improved to support young people in developing their competences and qualifications

From a view point of guidance, career learning activities must become a more integrated part of compulsory school curriculum and preferably have the same status as other topics like language and mathematics. The specific content of careers education should be aimed at developing children’s’ and young people’ ability to choose and handle their future career. Among several others, the British researcher Bill Law has suggested a framework for

¹⁰ Super, 1990



compulsory schools work with career learning. In his model, called DOTS¹¹, the following areas of competences are being suggested:

- Decision-making skills
- Opportunity awareness
- Transition skills – and
- Self-knowledge

In combination, working within these areas should help children/young people to become ready to make choices that are more consistent with their own wishes and goals.

III.2.4. Innovative examples from schools

At vocational schools students at some courses are working at the school with projects like „create your own business“. These projects enhance students' ability to understand the complexity of the life in a business and that many different job roles can be involved in every type of business. Apart from teaching the students specific competences as, for example business administration, the students also gain insights into many other areas of the business life – e.g. development, sale and production

III.2.5. Examples of good practice and cooperative methods

Some of the most innovative approaches are taking place in the vocational education system. At some courses competitions are held among students and in cooperation with local companies. For example the competition could be about how to restructure the production line, or change a specific product to make the business more competitive and/or more productive.

At some courses at secondary level students also participate in „real-life“ tasks that have been handed over by local companies. These vary a great deal in both scope and content, depending on the specific course, but could for example be the development of a new product or device for a production line.

III.3. Recommendations – topics for discussion

Regarding teaching and learning at schools with the objective to prepare young people for the world of work the following issues might need to be addressed:

- If and how we are able to generalise what competencies young people need to become employable and/or self-employed

¹¹ Law, 1999

2nd Survey Country Report



- How different activities enhances young peoples understanding of the world of work (picture of themselves and their opportunities)
- What is actually at stake when choosing a career and what consequences that should have on the career education that takes place in compulsory schools and further on



V. Working Group: Transition

IV.2.1. The most relevant changes in the world of work?

In Denmark, as in other EU-countries, the most evident change in the world of work is that the qualification demands have become more fluid, changing and unpredictable, due to the general economic development and the continuous changes on the demand side. Denmark has undergone a rapid transformation from an economy dominated by agriculture to more diversified business conditions.¹² This transformation required many new types of education and training and, as described earlier, comprehensive reforms have taken place in the education system in order to address these changes.

Though it has become increasingly difficult to foresee or predict future qualification demands, policy makers tend to generalize these, in favour of the demands held by specific segments of the labour market, e.g. ICT-businesses or other highly developed companies. The British researcher Helen Colley draws a somewhat different picture of the present demands when referring to the fact that: „Hairdressing, warehouse-keeping and shelf-stacking are three of the fastest-growing occupations in the UK“¹³. This implicates, as she states, „a rather different face on the ‘choices’ on offer“, but it also calls for a more diversified approach when trying to interpret labour market demands.

IV.2.2 The needs and demands in the labour market

As described above the labour market demands has become somewhat difficult to generalize because of the more diversified employment sector – and, as Colley stress: „ We might even question if there is such a thing as ‘the objective needs of society‘“¹⁴. She draws our attention to other British researchers that argue that many contemporary commentaries on the ‘new world of work’ are misleading. If that is in fact the case guidance practitioners’ need to pay more attention toward the diversity of labour market demands rather than draw generalised conclusions about these.

All this considered, the trends in regards to new demands held towards young people who enter the labour market could be listed as follows:

- Flexibility in terms of both geographic and „trade“ mobility
- Willingness to continuously participate in learning new skills and attitudes
- Readiness to meet changing performance demands

IV.2.3. Competences relevant to remain on the labour market

¹² Thematic review, OECD 1998

¹³ Colley, Helen 2004

¹⁴ Ibid



As suggested earlier competences relevant to remain on the labour market depends highly on the specific sector and/or even on the particular business. To be able to foresee future competence demands would implicate – as the sociologist Manuel Castells would probably put it – that one actually knows what role the „region“ Denmark will play in the future globalised network of trades and industries. According to Castells most of the global workforce is still occupied in what he calls „old economy jobs“ which have qualification demands that differs a lot from „new economy jobs“. Thus, the determination of future competence demands rests highly on our ability to predict how the labour market will develop.

Following Castells thesis¹⁵, the risk of becoming unemployed may rest more on the structure of the future market, than on the individuals' actual level of education. According to him even people with a high level of education are at risk of becoming „irrelevant“ – especially if they have been trained in „old economy jobs“. Whilst some companies hold high demands towards their employees, e.g. in terms of participating in further education and updating one's competencies, others might require more „narrow“ and/or specialised competencies. According to Colley it is „a minority (that) may enjoy more flexible and creative work (...) far more people are trapped in unglamorous manual and service sector jobs“¹⁶.

IV.2.4 Indicators that suggests a youth friendly society

In the Danish society one can identify the following 3 areas that suggest a youth friendly economy:

- Courses at secondary level education and most courses at higher education are free of charge. In vocational secondary education students receive a „learners-salary“ when they are in the company (apprenticeship model).
- Students at the age of 18 and above attending general and upper secondary level of education, are entitled to receive student grants and have access to additional student loans to cover living expenses while studying. (Students at vocational secondary education are likewise, when attending the initial courses at technical and commercial colleges.)
- Young people enrolled in education are entitled to apply for access to special rooms/housing opportunities for as long as thy are attending courses (in Danish: Studenterkollegier)

IV.2.5. Existing networks related to WOW

Students enrolled in vocational education have access to take part in the trade unions' special apprenticeship clubs. These create a link between the employers, the learner and the trade union and handle questions that has to do with the training period.

¹⁵ Castells, 2000

¹⁶ Colley, 2004



Students enrolled in other courses e.g. short and medium circle course, form student networks that sometimes are also involved in providing information on practical training places, vacancies and job-options.

IV.2.6. Experience with getting in contact with companies

Today many contacts between employers and employees are being established through personal networks and many websites has been created to link jobseekers with current and relevant vacancies. At education institutional level students have access to special arrangements where they can meet representatives from companies and vice versa. Companies attend trade fares to promote their company and attract their future workforce, and institutions arrange fares to ease companies' access to relevant staff. The latter can be arranged in many different ways, e.g. by creating trainee or company dating sites and meetings.

IV.2.7. Examples of good practices concerning networks

The Danish Employers Confederation (DA) had until recently a close cooperation with local schools in what was called a school-contact network of consultants who helped local schools in providing access to practical training places. Today the contact between compulsory schools and employers is the responsibility of various employers' organisations, e.g. Danish Industry (DI)¹⁷ who now provides services that include study visits to local companies, teaching materials to use at both compulsory schools and vocational colleges, guest teaching and the provision of short term practical training places.

Likewise the employee organisation The Danish Federation of Trade Unions (LO) has established a service that address the need of information regarding the various trades and industries. LO also publishes teaching materials that can be used in compulsory school when teaching the topic – described in chapter 2.1.2. An example is a publication that describes different jobs and the types of work you perform in different sectors.¹⁸

The above mentioned organisations are important links between the school system and the world of work. In addition to this different networks are created within various parts of the education system. An example is the network of guidance counsellors who helps students at vocational colleges to gain access to training places in other EU-countries (PIU).

IV.3. Recommendations – topics for discussion

Focussing on young peoples actual transitions from the life as a student to participation on the labour market discussions about successful transitions offer a number of challenges to the professionals who are helping students in the process. Topics for discussion could be:

¹⁷ Skole.di.dk

¹⁸ Dit job. UV-materialer for 7.-10. klasse. Fagbevægelsens Skolekontaktarbejde



- The task itself „determine labour market demands“
- How and if qualification demands can be generalised to cover the whole labour market
- What factors are important to understand the interaction between the individual and the labour market and the role each part plays in the meeting

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