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Vocational Guidance Education in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe

European Commission

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN FULL-TIME COMPULSORY EDUCATION

ICELAND

School year 2007/08

Education is compulsory for pupils between the ages of 6 and 16. Compulsory education is organised as a single structure *(grunnskóli)* without distinction between primary and lower secondary levels. The end of compulsory education is a key moment in terms of guidance. Pupils have the possibility to go on to general or vocational upper secondary education. The conditions of access vary according to the branch chosen.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Education at compulsory level is governed by the Compulsory School Act from 1995 *(Lög um grunnskóla)*. According to this Act, the local municipalities are responsible for the operation of schools at this school level.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues National Curriculum Guidelines (NCG) which are intended to provide more detailed objectives necessary to implement the Compulsory School Act. According to the Act each school is obliged to write its own school working guide which must be based on the NCG, but gives each school an opportunity to take into account its circumstances and special characteristics.

According to the Compulsory School Act, all municipalities are obliged to organise and provide young people with educational guidance. In order to facilitate pupils' decisions in their choice of educational and vocational pathway, all schools must provide pupils with careers guidance and information on training and career possibilities.

The importance of lifelong learning has introduced new challenges in the area of vocational guidance. In 1998, the Ministry of Education published a report which underlines the major importance of actions in the area of accessibility to information and vocational counselling services and to new information technologies for all citizens. The update of the skills and qualifications of guidance practitioners is also part of these challenges.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs share the responsibility for the establishment of educational and vocational guidance services. Other stakeholders, such as the local authorities, experts in the area, organisations of employers, the Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (*Félag náms- og starfsráðgjafa* – http://fns.is), etc., also play an important role in the development of these services.

In the employment sector, the network of public services supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Labour Department) provides information and counselling to people seeking employment, those with special needs (handicaps) and other target groups, sometimes in cooperation with the local authorities, schools or lifelong learning centres.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

According to the national curriculum guidelines, careers guidance may be integrated into the compulsory subject called 'Life Skills' but may also be part of other optional subjects. Based on guidelines, each school elaborates its own programme in which it is obliged to include the details on the way in which careers guidance will be taught. 'Life skills' is a compulsory subject from the 4th to the 10th year of compulsory education (one lesson per week). The general objective is to help pupils develop their social and personal skills, respect for themselves and others as well as to encourage their spirit of initiative, creativity and capacity to adapt to a changing environment and the challenges of society.

Electives are a part of compulsory education. Compulsory schools must define and clarify the aims of the electives that are offered. Furthermore, they must submit teaching schedules, lists of topics to be covered and decisions concerning the nature of assessment, and introduce these plans to pupils and their parents as soon as they have been approved by the local authority. Individual schools must organise up to 30 % of the total teaching time to electives in years 8, 9 and 10. In these years the schools must offer their pupils the possibility to choose between subjects and fields of study. The aim behind this increased freedom is to allow individual pupils to adjust their education according to their needs and to allow them to emphasise in their studies what they are interested in and how they see fit to plan their future in cooperation with their parents, teachers and educational counsellors. There are various course options in the last year of compulsory schooling which the pupil, his/her parents and teachers may jointly decide on in their search to obtain the best educational solution for that particular pupil.

The electives that are offered in years 8, 9 and 10 may be divided into three main groups. Firstly, there are electives that prepare pupils systematically for the academic education programmes of secondary school. Secondly, there are electives that relate to specific preparation for a professional career, or for further education in the fields of arts or technology. Thirdly, pupils are able to select subjects that broaden their horizons or make their lives more meaningful.

Traineeships within the framework of the curriculum

According to the regulations concerning optional subjects in compulsory education (No 387/1996), the school may, in cooperation with the pupils concerned and their parents, validate a traineeship or vocational training as an optional subject.

OTHER TYPES OF ACTIVITY/GUIDANCE SERVICES

Contacts with the professional world

These contacts are determined by local authorities and schools and vary from one school to another. This is practised at lower secondary level, mainly in years 9 and 10.

Guidance services at school

A guidance counsellor in a school environment has four main functions: prevention (research, directing towards other services, proposals for organisational changes and

counselling); a therapeutic function (assistance with searching for solutions to personal problems which prevent pupils from benefiting from their educational experience and which hinder their development); an informative function (gathering and dissemination of information on educational and vocational possibilities, either individually or collectively through school guidance programmes); and a development function (individual counselling in order to help pupils reflect on their school results and on their professional interests, and to understand how these elements must be taken into consideration in their educational choices and career plans).

All compulsory schools have access to counsellors who work either part-time or full-time. In some cases one counsellor is responsible for counselling in a couple of schools. In rural areas there is usually one counsellor for a whole region, working in many small schools.

Guidance services outside school

Information and counselling services offered within the framework of public employment services are not aimed directly at pupils in compulsory education.

QUALIFICATIONS OF GUIDANCE STAFF

The level of qualifications required for guidance counsellors is defined only for those working in upper secondary schools (they are obliged to have a university degree in educational guidance and teaching experience at upper secondary level). In compulsory education, they may have a degree in education, sociology or psychology. In large schools, they must have a specialised guidance degree, whereas in smaller schools they may be teachers or part of other staff.

A master's programme in educational guidance is offered by the faculty of social science of the University of Iceland. It lasts nine months and consists of 34 credits (one credit corresponds to 40-60 hours). Each year, twelve students with a bachelor's degree in education, psychology or a similar area are accepted for this programme.

Distance training lasting five semesters organised jointly by the Ministries of Education, Science and Culture and Social Affairs is offered to guidance staff in the employment sector. The ongoing training programmes are accessible in the form of traineeships abroad within the framework of European programmes, courses (*Akademia* programme) or study visits, for example.

In the employment sector, the quality standards for guidance practitioners are defined at central level.

COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Legislation encourages cooperation between schools and other stakeholders in the community. Parents are invited to participate in school activities (in particular via counselling provided to parents). The local authorities provide guidance counsellors in compulsory education schools with the possibility to organise training and study visits in cooperation with companies and other institutions. Peer education exists in a large number of schools, involving former pupils in particular.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Several projects involving online databases containing information on educational and vocational pathway possibilities are conducted jointly by the different ministries, social partners and school representatives. For example, an interactive programme on educational pathway possibilities including lifelong training is offered via the website www.mennt.is. Another project (www.idan.is) specialises in the possibilities offered by the labour market.

The public employment services have rooms equipped with computers allowing access to information on training possibilities, etc.

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