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Vocational Guidance Education in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe

European Commission

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN FULL-TIME COMPULSORY EDUCATION

LATVIA

School year 2007/08

Education is compulsory for pupils between the ages of 5 and 16. It begins during the two last years of pre-primary education (children aged 5 to 6) and continues during the 9 years of basic education (single structure without distinction between primary and lower secondary levels). The age of 16 is a key moment in terms of guidance. Pupils have the possibility to go on to general or vocational upper secondary education.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

The Law on Education defines **vocational guidance** as the provision of information regarding the opportunity to acquire vocational and higher education in compliance with the interests and abilities of the learner.

The 2002 Law on Assistance to the Unemployed and Job-seekers stipulates that the objective is to promote the competitiveness of these people on the employment market and to help them in their professional choices. The Law considers guidance and counselling services to be necessary preventive measures to reduce the rate of unemployment.

In order to improve the accessibility and quality of vocational counselling and careers education in the education sector, the Ministry of Education launched a project tender under the ESF National Programme for education in 2005 to reinforce the establishment of vocational guidance services and careers education *(Fostering the Implementation of Vocational Guidance Provision and Careers Education in the Education Sector)*. This project focuses in particular on in-service training for classroom teachers/tutors to prepare them to provide careers education, the establishment of professional standards for guidance practitioners and, following from this, the development of a master's degree programme. It also focuses on the development of training material and information resources. The project was implemented by the State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentura* – VIAA).

In 2006, the White Paper on Improvement of the Career Guidance System was passed by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia with the purpose of explicitly defining the terms used in the guidance system and improving the coordination of activities among guidance stakeholders at national level.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija* – IZM) and the Ministry of Welfare *(Labklājības ministrija)* are responsible for vocational guidance and counselling services.

In accordance with the 1998 Law on Education, the local authorities organise services for children and young people. According to the 1999 Law on Vocational Education (amended last in 2007), the Ministry of Education and Science organises the implementation of vocational guidance and careers education within the vocational education sector.

In 2000, the State Education Development Agency (a body under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science) created the National Centre for Vocational Guidance Resources (*Profesionālās orientācijas informācijas centrs* – POIC) to represent Latvia in the European Commission's Euroguidance Network.

As of 2007, the State Agency for Career Counselling (*Profesionālās karjeras izvēles valsts aģentūra* – PKIVA) has been integrated into the State Employment Agency as the Career Services Department. The Department is responsible for the application of the policy of the Ministry of Welfare in terms of guidance. The Department organises the provision of counselling to young people and adults (employed or unemployed), teachers and parents of pupils.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

In 2005, a new cross-cutting subject area entitled 'social science' was added to the curriculum for all nine years of basic education. This subject area covers four subjects: ethics, health education, introduction to economics and citizenship. The objective is to help pupils acquire a better understanding of themselves and of social processes, as well as skills allowing them to cooperate with others, take decisions, etc. In the framework of this cross-cutting subject, there are themes such as 'Me and my time' which include certain learning targets related to career guidance. The number of hours to be devoted to each theme is indicated, but it is up to the teacher to decide how much time to devote to each learning target. Career choice is also a popular topic for the annual project week when students practise research and group work methods.

Traineeships within the framework of the curriculum

Traineeships are limited to vocational education and do not play a role within the compulsory education level. Traineeships make up between 480 and 960 hours of the curriculum, depending on the level and type of qualification being trained for. They are intended to widen and improve the grasp of knowledge as well as enhance professional skills according to vocational standards. Traineeships provide practical work experience and are assessed as a separate subject area.

OTHER TYPES OF ACTIVITY/GUIDANCE SERVICES

Contacts with the professional world

Each year, 'job shadowing' – an 'observation day in the workplace' – is organised by Junior Achievement Latvia (a member organisation of Junior Achievement Worldwide) at national level for students in years 1-12. Students accompany an employee of a business, public body or organisation for at least four hours during one working day. Schools must sign an annual partnership agreement with Junior Achievement Latvia to participate in these

activities. The objective of 'Job Shadowing' is to allow pupils to have direct contact with the professional world.

Within schools, class teachers and deputy directors for out-of-school activities organise excursions to companies or arrange for representatives of companies to visit schools or participate in career day events.

Guidance services at school

Since vocational guidance in the general education sector is the responsibility of local governments, there are varying levels of guidance services available at schools in different regions. In most cases, career choice and other subjects related to educational and vocational guidance are discussed with pupils during the hour devoted to the teacher/tutor and his or her class. The teacher/tutor may invite representatives of the State Employment Agency, who test the pupils to determine their skills, interests, preferences and attitudes. Stronger emphasis is placed on educational and vocational guidance during the three last years of basic education (years 7-9).

Furthermore, if necessary, schools may provide psychological assistance to pupils, parents and teachers; pupils with learning difficulties may take remedial classes, etc.

The project currently implemented by the State Education Development Agency under the ESF National Programme of the Ministry of Education, organises the creation and piloting of methodological material for careers education (workbooks intended for pupils and kits for teachers) in general education (years 7-9 and 10-12) and in vocational schools.

Guidance services outside school

The State Employment Agency provides counselling to young people and adults (employed or not), teachers and parents of pupils. The counsellors who work there use different methods, including individual or group consultations on the choice of educational and vocational pathways or on career planning, as well as consultations to determine the individual characteristics and professional areas or professions likely to correspond best to each pupil. They organise workshops on job search techniques and writing a curriculum vitae, etc. In 2008, the structure of the agency included 26 local offices.

Guidance for people with special needs is provided by the Social Integration State Agency and takes into account the physical and mental challenges of clients as well as their career interests and abilities. These services are available for persons who have completed at least basic education.

QUALIFICATIONS OF GUIDANCE STAFF

In the schools

The ESF National project, currently implemented by the State Education Development Agency, organises the establishment of four training modules (72 hours) to improve the qualifications of teachers in terms of providing careers education: a basic module and three specialised modules (for teachers working with students in years 7-9, 10-12 and vocational

school). It has also organised training for 40 teacher trainers/multipliers and for a total of over 5 000 teachers.

The development of a national qualification framework and a master's degree programme for the training of guidance counsellors (including detailed content and methodological support for the establishment of courses) are part of this ESF project. The study programme was implemented in autumn 2007 in five higher education institutions. The graduates will receive a professional master's degree *(maģistra grāds)* and a professional qualification upon completing 2 years of full-time or 2.5 years of part-time studies.

As yet, there is no specific staff position at schools devoted exclusively to career counselling. Class teachers and social science teachers include career choice and educational pathway issues in their lessons. School libraries contain information materials which can be accessed by teachers and students. Discussions are under way at national policy level to decide whether career guidance counsellors should be considered as part of the teaching staff or as auxiliary staff at schools. This status will determine if their salaries should be paid by the Ministry of Education and Science or by local authorities.

In other guidance services

The career counselling staff of the State Employment Agency must have either a bachelor's or a master's degree (academic or professional) in psychology or education. The Agency's Career Services Department organises in-service training for staff on different career guidance methods and tools.

COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The White Paper on the 'Improvement of the Career Guidance System' (2006) foresees the need to establish a policy coordinating body at national level, including both representatives of ministries and social partners. The development of the Career Support System Cooperation Council was initiated in 2007.

On a practical level, contacts between schools, employers and parents take place informally and not on a regular basis, within the context of out-of-class activities, project weeks or career days. The level of activity in this area is at the discretion of individual schools, some of which are more active than others.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

The ESF National Project, currently implemented by the State Education Development Agency, has created a searchable electronic database on educational opportunities as well as self-evaluation tests accessible online. The project has also produced a series of DVDs on job clusters in five industry sectors, and three student guidebooks on choosing an educational pathway after the 9th or 12th form.

The State Employment Agency's Career Services Department includes the Division for Methodological Support which produces reference tools for guidance counsellors. The department has produced a catalogue of professions which is available in printed and electronic format. The department has also produced daily planners for students, which

include questions and exercises to promote career exploration. The department's website allows registered users to access various electronic tools for facilitating career choices.

Several organisations, both public and private, produce various types of printed or electronic catalogues of education opportunities.

Euroguidance Latvia, located within the Career Guidance Department of the State Education Agency, compiles information on vocational and educational guidance issues in Latvia and Europe. The information is used to create printed and electronic materials for policymakers and guidance practitioners, as well as end users.

Internet references

National Database on Educational Opportunities: www.niid.lv

ESF National Project, 'Fostering the Implementation of Vocational Guidance Provision and Careers Education in the Education Sector':
http://www.viaa.gov.lv/Euroguidance/kipnis/index.htm

State Education Development Agency: www.viaa.gov.lv

State Employment Agency: www.nva.gov.lv

The Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations: http://isec.gov.lv/en/index.shtml

Junior Achievement Latvia: http://www.pirmaismiljons.lv/parjal/Lapas/default.aspx

Sources

1. *Izglītības likums* (Law on Education), last amended 1 January 2007.
2. *Profesionālās izglītības likums* (Law on Vocational Education), last amended 1 September 2007.
3. *Bezdarbnieku un darba meklētāju atbalsta likums* (Law on Support to Unemployed Persons and Job-seekers), last amended 1 January 2008.
4. *Koncepcija "Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas pilnveidošana"* (White Paper on the 'Improvement of the Career Guidance System'), approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 29 March 2006.
5. *MK Noteikumi par valsts standartu pamatizglītībā un pamatizglītības mācību priekšmetu standartiem Nr. 1027* (Cabinet Regulation No. 1027 on the National Standard of Basic Education and Standards for Teaching Subjects in Basic Education), last amended 3 March 2008.
6. *Sociālās zinības 1.-9. klasei – mācību programmas paraugs* (Social Sciences for Years 1-9 – Sample Curriculum); Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations, Riga 2007.

National Euroguidance Centre

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