

Country report - Denmark

The country report from Denmark include four themes: Theme 3: Harnessing diversity, Theme 4: Impact evidence and Theme 5: Role of the citizen. The report is based on contribution and consultation with the Danish Ministry of Education.

Theme 3: Harnessing Diversity

Key challenges in managing cultural and other social differences in developing policies and strategies for career development

In Denmark a number of national goals for education and career guidance have been pointed out within the last 2 years. The Danish government established different important and influential commissions (Regeringen 2006) with the purpose of formulating recommendations on the basis of analyses of needs of specific educational and guidance arrangements, efforts and tasks. In short their focused challenges and recommendations are as follows:

The major challenges pointed out concerning cultural and social differences connected to career development are:

- In youth education the rate of dropouts is much too high, especially in vocational colleges
- One fifth of one years' youth population does not get a youth education and similarly half of one years' youth population with foreign ethnic background does not get a youth education
- A large percentage of adults lack sufficient basic skills in literacy, and lacks motivation to participate in formal adult education

Recommendations and strategies suggested by these commissions and committees are:

- Earlier language (e.i. Danish) stimulation and training in preschool and in basic school
- Obligatory participation in doing home work for pupils with special needs
- Courses for parents of foreign origin about the Danish Educational system
- Placing responsibility on local municipalities concerning goals for youth education (85 % in 1020 and 95 % in 2015 – it is 80 % today)
- Actions to improve guidance about youth education with special focus on young people with special guidance needs
- Improvement of guidance support concerning search for practical training places
- Motivation for participation in adult education and recognition of prior learning
- Actions to strengthen basic skills among low skilled and vulnerable groups, incl people with language problems in Danish
- Actions to improve the attraction and flexibility of adult education and to make it more adaptable to the needs of the individuals and the companies
- Actions to support a more extensive activity in adult education through managerial and financial frames

Another important source of recommendations comes from an extensive evaluation of the Danish Guidance Reform (EVA 2007), that is an evaluation of the practice and effects of guidance in Youth Guidance Centres (UU) and {HYPERLINK "http://eng.uvm.dk/guidance/regional_guidance_centres.htm" } (Studievalg).

The evaluation report points at some significant challenges here:

- The problem of defining and limiting the group of young people with special guidance needs, which leads to an incoherent and inefficient guidance effort
- Lack of prioritisation of guidance efforts towards the ones with special guidance needs
- Lack of evidence (research) of the effect of guidance efforts

The report strongly recommends common definitions of special guidance needs, and focussing/targeting guidance efforts towards those with social, educational or vocational difficulties.

Important career development issues for particular cultural and social groups

The challenges and development issues that are focused in these surveys and reports can be summed up in the following issues:

- Reducing the dropout from youth education in order to enhance equal opportunities for both young people with foreign and with Danish background concerning further education
- Reducing the differences in educational level between young people with a privileged social background and those with foreign or a poor social background (lack of social, educational and cultural capital)
- Making it attractive and economically attainable to participate in adult education for the group of adults within and outside the labour market who are low skilled or have language problems, and subsequently are excluded from further education and/or a wider choice of vocation
- Setting up standards, procedures and settings for recognition of prior learning for adults

Guidance efforts and career development policies aimed at social integration

A number of projects and development activities have been initiated as a result or follow up of the above mentioned reports and recommendations. A few of them should be mentioned here:

- Law (L559) from the Ministry of Education: Identification of pupils with special guidance needs from grade 6 in primary schools; study plans for all pupils; mentors for pupils with little contact to and support from adults
- Initiatives targeted at young people with special needs: Mentor arrangements for specific groups of young people connected to the transition from grade 9 in primary school to vocational education and training; systematic reaching-out activities concerning drops-outs from youth education; interviews with pupils in youth education with a risk of dropping out.
- A great number of development and research projects have been funded by the Danish Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Integration and/or EU. These projects include one about gender, ethnicity and guidance aiming at including ethnic minorities in the strategy of breaking gender segregation at the labour market (Sørensen et al. 2007), and mentor pilot projects involving nine Youth Guidance Centres aimed at transition from secondary school to youth education (Ministry of Education 2005).
- In the spring of 2007 the government and The National Association of Local Authorities launched 'Project Youth Education for All'. 17 'model municipalities' have been appointed to initiate actions to rise the percentage of youth education participation from 80 to 95 %. The project runs until 2010.
- In the summer of 2007 a cross-ministerial group launches a project aimed at low skilled adults – 'reinforcement of adult career guidance and counselling'. The initiative is a follow-up of the recommendations from The Commission on Social Welfare, and includes adult guidance networks, 'education ambassadors', company networks and a national research centre for recognition of competencies (prior learning).

Questions to be discussed concerning these challenges and initiatives

- Which elements and criteria's should a definition of 'special guidance needs' contain and how could it become operational?
- What effect will the above mentioned initiatives have on social integration in education and on the labour market – and which indications are we looking for? Methods to measure it?
- Apart from educational and guidance initiatives which changes in the field of economic, social and housing policies are necessary to meet the very complex challenges of social integration?

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Theme 4: Impact evidence

Quality assurance

The requirements concerning quality assurance are stated partly in the new act on guidance (Act on Guidance in Relation to Choice of Education, Training and Career, Act nr. 298 of April 30, 2003. { HYPERLINK "<http://eng.uvm.dk/guidance/guidance.doc>" }), and partly in the executive orders covering the Regional Guidance Centres (Studievalg) and the Youth Guidance Centres (UU).

Measurements tools

The Ministry provides the guidance centres with a set of quality assurance tools to ensure that they reach the act's main targets through continuous evaluation of their activities. This includes tools to report quality level, user satisfaction and results and effects of the activities. The quality assurance system works at two levels:

- at centre level through the individual centres' annual activity plans and reports, self-evaluation etc.
- at national level through the monitoring carried out by the Ministry of Education and through the knowledge and resources collected and disseminated to the centres by the Ministry's Centre of Expertise for Guidance.

Quality assurance manuals

The manuals outline the systematic milestones which the centres have to reach to improve their services. They also provide guidelines for how to report the outcome and effects of their activities to the Ministry of Education. The reports have to contain a list of the activities carried out (production statistics), possible outcome of the activities (user satisfaction), and the long-term effects of the guidance services.

In general, the Ministry's concept for development of the quality of guidance services involves three interdependent factors:

1. Methods and tools
2. Guidance practitioners' qualifications
3. Organisation and networks

By improving these factors and making them more tangible, the individual centres' ability to assure and further develop the quality of their own guidance services will be strengthened. The work related to quality assurance is a task for each of the municipal or regional centres. However, annual reports and developments will be discussed at yearly reviews with the municipal councils and the Ministry.

The Monitoring system

The monitoring system contains the following elements:

Production statistics

Every three months each centre makes production statistics, which contain the number of personal guidance interviews, and the number of group sessions and information events; both divided into different sub-categories.

Monitoring of effects

A set of key figures is selected to evaluate the transition pattern in the geographically divided areas. The key figures are:

Percentage of young people, who have completed a youth education programme, moving on to higher education or employment immediately, one year or two years after completing their youth education programme.

Graduation- and dropout-rates and percentage of students changing education 1, 2, 3... years after graduated youth education.

The percentage of pupils continuing in the education system after compulsory school; i.e. moving on to the 10th form, general upper secondary education, or vocational education and training; 3, 15 and 27 months after graduation, respectively.

The number of pupils is divided into categories of 9th and 10th form and type of school (public or private basic school or boarding school).

In order to have a clear picture of the possible shift in transition patterns, the years before the reform have been evaluated (2000, 2001 and 2002). The Ministry is aware of the fact that other factors than guidance, influence young people's pathway through the education system. We do, however, consider transition trends to be an indicator of the effects of the guidance services.

Discussion

The effect of guidance is primarily measured in qualitative parameters, which can be used in evaluating the objectives of the government as described in theme 1 and 2. Guidance is one among several initiatives being implemented to achieve the goals of the government, and for that reason the effectiveness of the measurements cannot only relate to an effect of guidance but will presumably be influenced by several initiatives.

This is confirmed by the centres of guidance which find that the impact evidence that the Ministry of Education provides, are problematical as an indicator of the effect of the guidance. The impact evidence does not show which kind of guidance that gives cause for an expedient outcome.

Likewise, evaluation of user satisfaction is not necessarily synonymous with good guidance. Evaluation of user satisfaction provides a sense of how guidance is experienced, but it does not tell if the guidance have had an influence on the considerations on education of young people. In that way, it is not clear, if the guidance has a satisfactory effect and therefore, the centres of guidance ask for methods for measuring the effect of learning of young people.

Guidance may be seen as tool to achieve the financial goals of the government. In this case, the existing methods of evaluation are sufficient. If, on the other hand, guidance is seen as a process in which the beneficiary of guidance learns how to make informed choices and perhaps to see choices in a new perspective, then new ways to measure the effect the learning aspects of guidance are required.

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Theme 5: Role of the citizen

The primary beneficiaries of guidance are the direct users. At which level should they be involved? This report points to levels of involvement that go beyond satisfaction surveys and into democratisation.

Danish quality assurance systems in guidance include a number of issues, one of which is the users. Thus, two sets of quality manuals (Undervisningsministeriet 2004 a; 2004b) spells out three quality levels:

1. Activities (what kind of guidance activities?)
2. Results (are the *users* satisfied?)
3. Effects (at a societal level)

On this basis, the statistical results of user-satisfaction surveys in, for example, the seven Regional Guidance Centres are benchmarked nationally and yearly (see { HYPERLINK "http://www.uvm.dk/vejl/studievalg_bruger.htm?menuid=7570" }). They show little regional diversity and a high degree of user satisfaction. These surveys are limited to the aspect of information in guidance in posing two simple questions:

‘Do you have sufficient information on educational options to make an informed choice?’. And if not: *‘Do you know where to find additional information?’*

The Resolution on Lifelong Guidance (EU, 2004), however, takes this further and states as one of its central principles that the users are the focal point of guidance, also in relation to the design of guidance activities:

‘The centrality of the beneficiaries of guidance in both the design and evaluation of guidance provision for both young people and adults.’

Further, CEDEFOP (2005) spells this out in greater detail regarding the principles that must underlie the provision of guidance:

Centrality of the citizen

- Independence : the guidance provided respect the freedom of the career choice and personal development of the citizen/user
- Impartiality: the guidance provided is in accordance with the citizen’s interests only, is not influenced by provider, institutional and funding interests, and does not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, social class, qualifications, ability, etc.

- confidentiality: citizens have a right to the privacy of personal information they provide in the guidance process
- equal opportunities: the guidance provided promotes equal opportunities in learning and work for all citizens
- holistic approach: the personal, social, cultural and economic context of a citizen's decision-making is valued in the guidance process.

Enabling citizens

- empowerment: the guidance provided assists citizens to become competent at planning and managing their learning and career paths
- active involvement: guidance is a collaborative activity between the citizen and the provider and other significant actors, e.g. learning providers, enterprises, family members, community interests.'

Clearly, this text emphasises the involvement of the users in guidance, but only as far as being precisely a user. As demonstrated below, this is only one or two steps on the way to a much more profound and inclusive guidance policy-making agenda.

Danish Examples

Vuorinen (2005) argues that stronger links between guidance research and policy making are needed. This research basis will benefit greatly from the active involvement of guidance users, as demonstrated in the action-research project Eurocounsel (see { [HYPERLINK "http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/1997/27/en/1/ef9727en.pdf"](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/1997/27/en/1/ef9727en.pdf) }) which over a period of 5 years in the 1990 highlighted the importance of user involvement, in co-designing guidance offers (Hurley, 1994). One such Danish example, from Maribo in Southern Denmark, depicted the case of empowerment where a self-governing group of unemployed people made use of a meeting room at the local employment office, with free telephone and fax, and, importantly, access to guidance resources when and if they requested the guidance officer to be present in their group. They stated their needs. Thus, the power was with the unemployed, not with the employment service. This approach showed a way out of clientism (Plant, 1994; 2005).

One further and more recent example is the Association of People on Welfare Benefits, which is located on the easternmost Danish island of Bornholm. This remarkable activation project (supported by the EU Social Fund) for long-term unemployed people, which in fact is focused on excavation fossils of Danish dinosaurs, has become a tourist attraction in itself. It is based on a number of principles which all concern the importance of user involvement, apart from the fact that an enthusiastic leader is essential:

- Participation is voluntary – this is seldom the case in other activation projects
- Self-government and self-responsibility – the participants have formulated the framework and rules of the project
- The project has a clear goal and is of use to others
- Personal peer networks and thus peer-guidance are crucial to the success of this kind of bottom-up approach.

The project was evaluated by Pless (2000), who followed and interviewed the participants over a longer period of time, finding that the key to success of this project of long-term unemployed people, many of whom had drug and alcohol problems, lay in the genuine sense of ownership and commitment. This is also seen in the fact that the project has produced a children's booklet on the findings as part of a

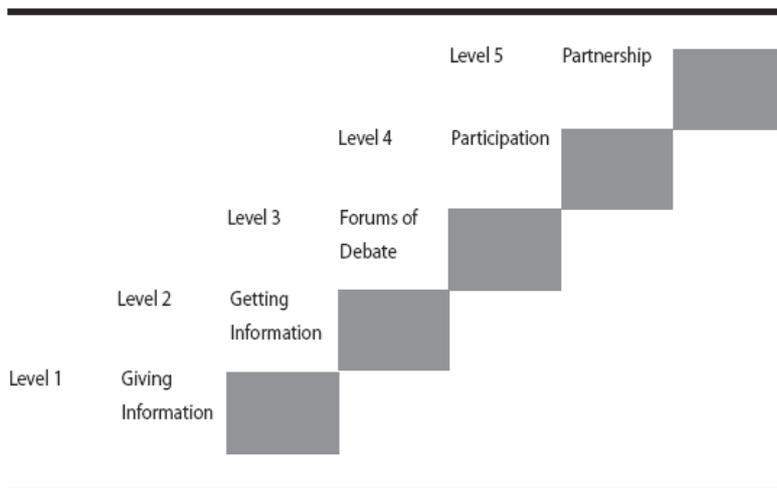
dissemination strategy (Benthien, 2003). Few activation projects would have this kind of impact.

Taxonomy

Thus, user involvement can be taken even further, at three levels:

- *Individual level* – Individuals are involved in shaping their own experience of using the service.
- *Service level* – Service users and other interested parties suggest how to improve the operation of the service, set priorities, identify gaps, address unmet needs, and so on.
- *Strategic level* – Participation and consultation at the wider strategic level of planning, developing and reviewing services.

Moreover, as part of the European Joint Actions project, *Developing National Forums for Guidance in Six Member States* ('MEDSUI', in which Denmark took an active part), Plant (2006) developed a five step taxonomy based on Arnstein (1969), to illustrate the potential power of involving users, not only as consumers or clients, but as co-designers of guidance services at several levels (see Fig 1, below):



**Figure 1. Levels of engagement with service users
(model adapted from DAAT (2005), after Arnstein (1969))**

As this model indicates, involving service users at the level of policy and strategy development means moving well beyond the provision of ‘customer service’-style feedback or the rubberstamping of ideas that are already fully developed. Genuine user involvement implies discussion, negotiation, capacity building and partner-like arrangements between professionals and ordinary people in the interests of developing sustainable, ‘bottom-up’ approaches. This is social inclusion, community cohesion, active citizenship and participatory democracy in practice (Plant, 2006).

Examining the above-mentioned model in greater depth unfolds the potential depth of the involvement of users (see Fig 2, below):

| Level Based on Arnstein | Type of involvement | Example of involvement | Level |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--|------------|
| Level 1 | Getting information | Being told what is available | Individual |
| Level 2 | Giving information | Telling services what it is like to use them | Individual |
| Level 3 | Forums of debate | Workshops, focus groups, consultations | Service |
| Level 4 | Participation | Involved in shaping policies and strategies | Strategic |
| Level 5 | Partnership | Deciding with others what policies and strategies need reshaping | Strategic |

Figure 2. A model for understanding types and purposes of user involvement (DAAT, 2005)

Engagement on this basis aims to be empowering, and has the potential to ensure that policies are developed that are consistent with the needs and interests of service users – from a bottom-up perspective, rather than a top-down one. In essence, involving the users as co-designers, is an agenda of democratisation.

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