



# **Voice of users**

Preliminary results



## **Report from Denmark**

**November 2010**

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# Voice of Users

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## 1. Background information

The focus group interviews in Denmark were conducted by researcher Carla Tønder Jessing. I am assistant professor at VIA University College in Aarhus and I am working on European and national projects on career guidance. I am also training guidance practitioners at diploma level (post profession bachelor level).

The interviews took place in Aarhus and Copenhagen (participants representing urban and rural areas). As the managers of guidance centres and educational institutions offering adult guidance often combine management with a role as career counsellor to some extent or they have a past as counsellors, there will be practical experiences presented in summaries of all interviews. There were no significant differences between urban and rural representatives. Therefore the results will be presented as unified summaries for the three groups of participants.

### 1.1. How were the focus group interviews conducted

The focus group interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, which means that I did not strictly follow the order of questions in the interview guides. Some answers and discussions developed in a way that made it useful to deviate from the order, but the results will be presented according to the order of the questions.

The taxonomy was presented and given in a copy during all the interviews at a point in the discussion where it felt natural to illustrate the levels of involvement, and it worked as a way to understand the levels more concretely. With the clients it was not shown until the end of the interview. In one of the clients groups I chose to do the exercise “Remembering your future”<sup>1</sup> to make imagining of future changes in adult guidance easier for the participants.

The focus group interviews in Aarhus were done within one week in April 2010 and they lasted 1½ hours each. The focus group interviews in Copenhagen were done in June (managers) and in August (practitioners and clients).

In Aarhus the interview with practitioners was carried out first. There were five participants. The interview with clients<sup>2</sup> was done four days later. There were four participants (two did not turn up). The interview with managers was carried out immediately after the clients’ interviews – done as one interview with three participants and one interview with one participant, as it turned out to be logistically impossible to make four busy managers meet at the same time.

In Copenhagen the interviews were carried out later – in June and August 2010. There were three participants in the group of managers, five participants in the group of practitioners, and five participants in the client group.

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<sup>1</sup> “Imagine that you are in a consultation board for guidance. How did you end up there? What process took place? Who was there with you? What would you do to enhance guidance and guidance delivery in your local environment? What would your ideas on the service of guidance be? What would your ideas on policy making in guidance be? How did you feel about the process and being part of the consultation board?”

<sup>2</sup> In Denmark the word ‘clients’ has an unwonted connotation to receivers of social benefits or lawyers’ customers, which makes it important to remember that in this context we understand ‘clients’ as guidance participants, or receivers of guidance, or guidance seekers, although some adult guidance is forced on to the clients when they are unemployed.

## 1.2. Presentation of participants

The managers represented five different institutions: Two day folk high schools, one folk high school, one regional guidance centre, one "private actor" running short guidance programs for unemployed adults, and one from the secretariat for adult education centres. There were four woman and three men.

The practitioners represented six different types of institutions: Two day folk high schools, one folk high school, one adult education centre, one regional guidance centre, one technical college running longer guidance and practice programs for unemployed adults, and one "private actor" running short guidance programs for unemployed adults. There were six women and four men.

The clients represented three types of institutions: Two day folk high schools (six participants), one folk high school (two participants), one technical college running longer guidance and practice programs for unemployed adults (one participant. Another participant from there did not come, and one participant from the "private actor" running short guidance programs for unemployed adults did not come either). There were five women (three young adults, 20-25, and two app. 35-45) and four men (three around thirty and one in his fifties). The clients represent different educational levels, and they are either unemployed course participants (seven), some of them in transition from one vocation to another, or folk high school participants (two).

## 1.3. Presentation of the institutions represented in the focus group interviews

All the following institutions offer adult educational, vocational and career guidance:

### *Folk high schools:*

The folk high schools have a high degree of freedom to choose the subjects, content and methods of their teaching, which means that there are great differences between the schools in this respect. The subjects must be of a broad, general nature for half of the time, but the rest of the time can be spent on going into depth with special subjects and skills. Some folk high schools, for instance, concentrate on music and theatre while in others the emphasis is on sports, art, politics or philosophy. General discussions about important topics are common in all the teaching.

The courses vary in length from four days to 36 weeks. Short courses are most frequently held during the summer with participants of all ages. The longer courses are held during the winter and the participants are normally in their early 20s. About 45,000 people a year take part in one of the short courses while the longer courses have approximately 8,000 participants.

There are 78 folk high schools located all around the country.<sup>3</sup>

### *Day folk high schools:*

The objective of the day folk high schools is to offer teaching that has an adult education or employment-creating aim and is organized for adults. The courses normally run for 4 to 18 weeks, and as a rule the teaching is full time.

Many day folk high schools offer FVU (Preparatory Adult Education).

The local authority can decide to give a grant to the non-formal adult education or employment-creating activity of the day folk high school when the school is organized as an independent, self-governing institution with its own board and own statute. The local authority decides the form that the municipal support is to take and may lay down further conditions for the grant. The local authority supervises the day folk high schools to which it awards grants.

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<http://eng.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Adult%20Education%20and%20Continuing%20Training/Non%20formal%20adult%20education.aspx>, downloaded 2010.05.07

In 2006 there were 52 day folk high schools with a total of approximately 16,000 participants<sup>4</sup>. Many of them also run short guidance programs for unemployed adults (outsourced from public jobcentres/public employment services, see below).

### ***Regional guidance centres:***

The 7 regional guidance centres are responsible for provision of guidance in relation to the transition from youth education programmes to higher education; and information on all higher education programmes in Denmark and the possible occupations or professions that these higher education programmes may lead to. The regional guidance centres' main target groups are:

- Pupils in youth education programmes.
- Young people and adults outside the education system who wish to enter a higher education programme.
- Pupils in youth education programmes with an extended need for guidance concerning choice of education, vocation and career.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Technical colleges running longer guidance and practice programs for unemployed adults:***

Adult vocational training programmes have been developed for low skilled and skilled workers. But everybody may participate irrespective of educational background. Only formal entrance requirement is being resident or holding a job in Denmark. In general:

- The programmes are mainly provided for low skilled and skilled workers having a job. Workers and employers in private as well as public sector enterprises may participate in the programmes.
- The unemployed in their first unemployment term may have a combination of adult vocational training programmes of their own selection for 6 weeks. Unemployed with a personal action plan from the job centres/local authorities may participate.
- Immigrants and refugees may follow ordinary courses or courses specifically developed for this group.

Statistics 2006:

Number of participants	617.000
Of which women	270.000
Number of individuals (participate in one or several programmes)	318.000
Number of full time equivalent participants	11.000
Number of schools (approximately)	120 <sup>6</sup>

### ***"Private actors" running short guidance programs for unemployed adults (outsourced from public jobcentres/public employment services):***

The active employment policy aims at contributing to ensuring a well-functioning labour market. This takes place in the form of a number of measures in relation to both unemployed and employed persons who are

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<http://eng.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Adult%20Education%20and%20Continuing%20Training/Non%20formal%20adult%20education.aspx>, downloaded 2010.05.07

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<http://eng.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Educational%20and%20vocational%20guidance/The%20Danish%20guidance%20system/Regional%20Guidance%20Centres.aspx>, downloaded 2010.05.07

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<http://eng.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Adult%20Education%20and%20Continuing%20Training/Adult%20vocational%20training.aspx>, downloaded 2010.05.07

looking for a job or wishing to undergo training or education. And it takes place in the form of measures targeted upon both private and public enterprises.

The active labour market policy has four overall objectives:

- to assist jobseekers in finding a job
- to offer services to private and public employers who are looking for labour or wish to retain their workforce
- to help persons who are receiving social assistance or start help to find a job quickly so that they will be able to support themselves and their families
- to help persons who due to reduced working capacity have a special need for assistance in finding a job

The employment measures apply to all unemployed persons irrespective of whether they are receiving unemployment benefits, social assistance, start help or sickness benefits.

It is a matter of a coherent employment policy with the focus on individualised measures in order to qualify and motivate the individual person to seek and obtain employment on the ordinary labour market. The emphasis is on making work pay. And on ensuring that all unemployed persons are actually available for work. All unemployed persons have a right and duty to receive an activation offer.

The public employment service (PES) is responsible for measures in relation to unemployed persons who are receiving unemployment benefits. The municipal authorities are responsible in relation to measures for unemployed persons who are receiving social assistance, start help or sickness benefits.<sup>7</sup>

### **Adult Education Centres:**

General adult education, AVU, is regulated by the Act on General Adult Education.

It is the objective of the general adult education AVU-courses to ensure adults the possibility of improving or supplementing their general knowledge and skills, strengthening their possibilities of acquiring general prerequisites for an active participation in a democratic society and of understanding and exerting an influence on their own situation, and to give them the possibility of acquiring general prerequisites for continued education and general knowledge and skills which are relevant in relation to working life.

General adult education (AVU) is offered by adult education centres (VUC). The adult education centres are self-governing institutions funded by the state.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Results from the interviews**

As the interviews are based on four main research questions, I will use these questions as main headings in the report. I will, where it is needed within each chapter, discuss the results for each of the groups in separate paragraphs and in the last paragraph (within each chapter) make some conclusions and inferences about all groups and the differences and similarities of their responses. Before I start presenting the results related to the four main questions, I will present the participants' definition of career guidance and effective guidance service.

### **2.1. Definition of career guidance**

The participants were given an open question about what the term career guidance means to them or if they found the term career alien to their context: what they understood by the term adult guidance.

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[http://uk.bm.dk/sitecore/content/BEM\\_UK/Home/Themes/The%20Danish%20Labour%20Market/Active%20labour%20market%20policy.aspx](http://uk.bm.dk/sitecore/content/BEM_UK/Home/Themes/The%20Danish%20Labour%20Market/Active%20labour%20market%20policy.aspx), downloaded 2010.05.07

<sup>8</sup> [http://eng.uvm.dk/~media/Files/English/PDF/081110\\_the\\_danish\\_education\\_system.ashx](http://eng.uvm.dk/~media/Files/English/PDF/081110_the_danish_education_system.ashx), downloaded 2010.06.28

## Managers

The managers' answers range from defining guidance as an activity between existential guidance and educational and vocational guidance at one end of a scale, to providing clients with tools to consider their own situation and information on rules at the other end of a scale. This reflects the representation of institutions in the focus group because some of them offer open career guidance for clients seeking it voluntarily, and others are working in a field with compulsory participation of unemployed adults (the clients lose their unemployment benefit if they do not participate) and a short time span to obtain their goals (action plans and employment or educational solutions).

Even when that is the case there are great similarities in their answers concerning the purpose of guidance. They all stress, that guidance must aim at making clients able to make their own choices. One of the managers from a day folk high school puts it this way: "In my context guidance is to try to shake their heads ... to give them tools to start considering their own situation ... and to make their own choices ... we should not push anything on to them". He adds that this is not easy because of some time pressure and because the adult participants here often are people in a transition phase in their lives. This is the case too for participants in guidance at the private actors.

The managers also stress that the needs of the clients varies to a great extent and as a consequence of that the guidance tasks for the practitioners varies much: Some students/participants never make use of guidance (in adult education centres and folk high schools), some participants/clients only need information or educational facts, others need help for making choices concerning courses, education or vocation, or setting up education or action plans, while quite a large number of clients especially in day folk high schools need help for solving personal and social problems, close to psychological help – and the practitioners here also have a task of drawing a line between guidance and therapeutic or social work.

The different positions among the tasks of these institutions and the different definitions of career guidance can be illustrated like this:

<b>Private actors /employment services:</b> Mature adults, compulsory participation, adults in transition	<b>Day folk high schools:</b> Young and mature adults both voluntary and "compulsory by choice", adults in transition	<b>Adult Education Centres:</b> Young and mature adults, being there by choice. Many of them: adults in transition	<b>Regional guidance centres:</b> Mainly young adults, being there by choice, and adults in transition	<b>Folk high schools:</b> Mainly young adults, being there by choice, and some adults in transition
Information about rules Help to find information Action plan Job seeking Realistic choices	Help to find information "Shake their heads" Tools to rethink own situation Competence evaluation Help to make qualified choices and decisions Action plan In some cases: Help to cope with	Help to find information Competence evaluation Help to make own decisions Education/course or in some cases career plan	Help to find information Information about education and the labour market Open sources for "customers" Help to make own decisions concerning education	Educational and vocational guidance sometimes close to existential guidance Help to make own decisions concerning life, education and vocation

	social and personal problems, and support/care			
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One of the managers questions the term *career* guidance which she finds alien in a Danish context – she prefers the term educational and vocational guidance. She connects the term ‘career’ to privileged positions or jobs in society and calls it a ‘boss word’, even if the term is commonly used in international and national theory and policy papers of guidance.

Another manager draws a line between career guidance and existential guidance or life guidance. He finds career guidance more concrete and specific – focused on coherence between clients’ choice of education and praxis in later work life, and existential guidance in his opinion is broader oriented towards life attitudes and resilience.

### *Practitioners*

The practitioners all reflect on the term *career* guidance which they also find alien in a Danish context for the same reasons as one of the managers, but after some discussion they more or less agree on a conclusion that they make career guidance and that their clients have career paths even as a low skilled worker or a blacksmith etc. They just mostly name it differently. One expresses it like this: “... you make a lot of choices in your life – life choices – continuing in your life, choices which ends up in a career. It has no end, it is lifelong. That is a career path”. Especially the practitioners from day folk high schools are reluctant to use the term *career* guidance because their participants/clients very often are in a life situation where a lot of support and care is necessary before career planning can be realised – they prefer the term educational and vocational guidance and some of them call it *life* guidance.

They all define (career) guidance as helping clients make realistic choices when planning their way (back) to education and/or employment, and they all place the dreams or wishes of the clients as the basis for the guidance process. The guidance process consists of giving information about education and labour market, clarifying the competences of the client, dialogues about the clients’ wishes for the future, dialogues about relevance of wishes compared to future labour market perspectives – that is what is realistic –, making lists of possibilities and set up action or education plans.

They define counselling and guidance differently – counselling is more connected to giving information and exact advice, and guidance is more connected to a dialogue based process of realization and choice making.

### *Clients*

Some of the clients find the term career guidance alien or irrelevant, especially the man in his fifties. He defines guidance as guidance in connection to writing job applications, getting answers to questions, and getting specific courses as part of competence development. Several of them also mention help to write education applications or help in becoming able to write job applications, good CVs etc. Some of them defines career guidance as ‘match-making’, that is finding a match between their competences and the demands and expectations of the labour market, expressed like this: “What can I sell myself on, what can I offer that the labour market needs?” And they mention that others (the practitioners) might be able to see that more clearly than they do themselves.

They all define guidance as both educational and vocational guidance, for the youngest ones primarily educational, and the women define guidance as help to choose the path “that is the right one for me”, one



calls it “the golden path for me”, and some talk about “a new path” that is better for them. They find it difficult individually to get an overview of possibilities and to make choices according to that all by themselves, so guidance is very important. They talk about finding out what they can and what the possibilities are and as a result of that making a plan. One talks about “help-to-self-help”. And one talks about the “right choice” and another talks about “make some choices”, but choice is the key word.

### *Discussion of differences and similarities between the groups*

In all three groups the majority sees the term career guidance as problematic, although both managers and practitioners find the content of the term covering the purpose and praxis of most adult guidance. They find the term educational and vocational guidance much more precise and appropriate in a Danish context – a term that has been used in Danish legislation and policy making on guidance for decades.

They also all define guidance as helping clients make choices according to their potentials, wishes and dreams. Implied in this is an assumption that the client is a subject not an object in the guidance process – and that choices and options should not be forced onto the client.

One important difference is that especially the managers connect the aim of helping clients make their own choices through guidance with the term ‘realistic’ – realistic in connection to employment opportunities and future labour market needs.

## **2.2. Understanding of effective guidance service**

### *Managers*

For the managers the key word in relation to effective guidance is *ownership* – which means that the client feels an ownership to the plan he or she has set up in the guidance process. And that the plan as a result of ownership is acted on by the client. The process might imply ‘reality confrontations’ and realizations that might be unpleasant, but they stress the importance of responsibility for the plan.

One of them relates effectiveness of guidance to the end of the guidance process and if the client has realized various options, alternatives, scenarios and on that background has made qualified choices that are meaningful and lasting. This implies humility from the practitioners’ side – holding back own ideas about what is good for the client – and instead giving the client tools for handling choice situations.

Managers from one day folk high school give an example of what they would define as effective guidance: Guidance integrated in their courses – the guidance practitioner also functions as teacher, and in that function he/she brings up questions relevant for the whole group (a kind of collective/group guidance). Paralleled to this he/she has individual guidance dialogues with clients, where individual problems can be discussed. At course start a contract is set up for the clients’ plans, goals and progression and this contract is a flexible tool for guidance praxis at the school. Effective guidance in their view is that guidance is “non-effective/non-efficient” – meaning that effect is created by giving enough time, space and room for clients’ development.

The managers agree that guidance must be differentiated and adapted to the clients.

### *Practitioners*

The practitioners give a variety of answers to the question: When the client is capable of making a qualified choice; when the client has changed his or her way of thinking or acting, or tried out new things, or realized new options; when the client is able to be re-employed for example after training or courses; that clients believe in their own choices and find them right; that the client take responsibility for his/her own life or choices; and that the client “can see her/himself” in a more existential way and realizes what she/he is

capable of. The criterion for success is progression, that the client “moves”, that he/she starts to imagine a future for him/herself.

One of the participants stresses, that it is not a question of time spent on guidance, but on the depth of realization in the client.

Key words for the practitioners in relation to effective guidance are ‘qualified choices’ and ‘changes’ in or with the clients.

A precondition for effective guidance is confidence between the partners, the practitioners and clients – both ways, and that the client is active. Another precondition is physical space or privacy for face-to-face guidance dialogues. The day folk high school guidance practitioners stress that follow-up and expectation of the clients’ feeling of obligation for his/her progression report is an important part of the effect of the guidance process, and they stress the importance of meeting the client as a person or as a human being, not just as a professional.

### *Clients*

The participants in both focus groups describe earlier experiences with guidance (in upper secondary school, in job centres, local municipality/social centre) rather negatively. They mention lack of time as a key factor and especially the unemployed adults mention the feeling of shame and of being ‘made clients’ (meaning not being equal, being a case, being bossed). They describe their reaction as de-motivation and resistance.

In general there are some tendencies in the clients’ answers connected to gender<sup>9</sup>. For the men effective guidance tends to be a question of *results and personal advice*: If the practitioners can help you ‘getting something’, a course for example; if the practitioner helps you finding a practice place using her private network, or can tell you what would be a fitting educational and vocational path for you in relation to your competences. But two of them also talk about the care and support from the practitioners. For the women effective guidance tends to be a question of ‘*chemistry*’, a good relation between the client and the practitioner with focus on the clients’ needs, and based on empathy, support, listening, containing and understanding from the practitioner. In connection to this one of them find it important and effective when the practitioner is “keeping her on track” when she gets too many different ideas – she thinks of the effective practitioner as almost a psychologist. Both men and women talk about *confidence and a personal relation* between practitioner and client as necessary for them.

They agree that the practitioner also must have life experience, be willing to “give something of herself”, have a broad knowledge of different educational options and be able to give concrete help concerning applications etc. When asked about what was helpful in the practitioners’ methods they pointed at: time and listening. And they added: the practitioners’ way of making them feel equal – the opposite would be being ‘talked down to’ or looked down upon, which would hinder the guidance process. They feel treated with respect and equality and in general they talk very positively about the guidance they receive.

### *Discussion of differences and similarities between the groups*

For all three groups guidance and effective guidance is connected to the individual client and her or his outcome of guidance – they do not connect it to the service organization or other structural issues or to formal qualifications of the practitioners. They all think of what is the result for the client.

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<sup>9</sup> These differences were expressed mainly in one of the client focus groups so it might not at all be significant.

The differences within this shared idea are mainly two: The managers and the practitioners are talking about ownership and qualified choices that make sense and are sustainable, and the clients talk about the necessity of empathy and support from the practitioner in order to help them make their own choices. The end target is shared, but in their explanations they focus on result versus process.

### 2.3. Research Question 1: Are users actively involved in guidance?

#### *Managers*

The answers to this question is closely linked to which kind of institution the managers represent – whether they represent institutions where participation is obligatory or forced onto the clients, meaning that they otherwise lose their unemployment allowance – or they represent institutions where clients come by choice and are seeking guidance.

In the first case where guidance is obligatory there is a longer or shorter phase introducing participants to the idea of getting information and help from guidance practitioners in finding new paths, new jobs or competence development – introducing them to the idea that the staff is there to help them and that they might benefit from using the opportunity. After that the process of guidance gradually can start.

At the same time these institutions are under time pressure and result pressure due to their contracts with job centres to get participants out in employment or qualification development/courses. They describe this as a constant dilemma: Having ideals of client based guidance and in some cases having to push clients into directions they do not choose themselves. They also point out the importance of high ethical standards when operating within these dilemmas.

Apart from that they all find client involvement ideal and necessary for securing ownership of clients' decisions and in the institutions where participants come by choice they find it easy to involve them in information seeking and decisions on guidance forms.

They also all point at the fact that their clients represent a variety of ages and backgrounds – some of them have no ICT-skills at all for example. The young adults are used to seek information via internet which makes it easy to involve them in information seeking and to give them tasks in that field, which they cannot give some of the mature adults. Another difference pointed out is a gender difference: women's willingness to discuss their situation in groups, and in general they accept individual or group guidance as helpful, whereas men are more reluctant or sceptical unless guidance is more information based and concretely related to employment.<sup>10</sup>

Involvement in their understanding also means that the number of sessions and the way guidance is carried out to a large extent is decided or influenced by the client. They believe that the question from the practitioner often would be “what do you think you can use me for, how would you like me to help?”

An answer to the question on raising the level of involvement is that maybe more group guidance could be useful, but they also point at difficulties connected to that.

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<sup>10</sup> As an example: The manager representing a private actor describes a majority of their target group as “big, strong men with big muscles with tattoos” being thrown out of their usual life situation. And the manager from a day folk high school with a majority of female participants on the other hand describes the psychic fragility in many of their participants that they cannot handle in their guidance.

### *Practitioners*

The practitioners draw the same picture of the necessity of delivering guidance at many different levels due to the differences in voluntariness of the clients' participation and also connected to different target groups. They make similar descriptions as the manager focus group – that is levels of involvement from under level 1, not involved in seeking information, barely in receiving information, to very active involvement in information seeking and personal clarification. One of them puts it this way: “you must be ready for making choices to be ready for guidance”.

They describe involvement levels ranging on a scale from almost “selling the message” (only information giving and pointing out directions) to a clarification process including narrative methods like drawing life space. Examples of pointing out directions could be ‘matching the client to the job’, that is pointing out labour market needs relevant for clients' competences, or telling clients which types of jobs they might fit into, giving advice; and examples of information seeking could be telephone calls from the client to employers or educational institutions or visiting these places; and examples of personal clarification could be filling out papers with goals at short sight, at longer sight and at long sight. In relation to the question on involvement in personal development the day folk high school practitioners answer that they involve the clients in clarifying their personal competences – they do not talk about personal development.

The practitioners also describe involvement as letting the client reflect on which kind of guidance they need – setting the agenda for the process. Many of them though regret the fact that they do not do it consequently or systematically. They agree that practitioners are interested in clients' involvement – they refer to what they said about effective guidance.

They consider respect for the client and the clients' wishes both part of a necessary attitude and part of professional ethics – even if they point out the dilemmas connected to respecting both society's demands and financing authorities on one hand and the clients' wishes on the other hand.

### *Clients*

The clients agree that guidance does not work if they are not actively involved in the process, as “it is yourself who have to find out for you” – otherwise it is of no use. They describe involvement in telling the practitioner how they would like to be helped; in gathering information; researching options and clarifying own interests between sessions; or deciding on courses they want; finding a practice place or contacting employers. Some of the clients from day folk high schools mention being involved in the ‘progression reports’ which are written about their time in the school and after the end of the course passed on to the local municipality/social centre. They also have a number of planned dialogues with their guidance practitioner about plans and progression from one meeting to the next.

They all agree on their active involvement in setting goals for themselves and being active in evaluating whether plans change on the path towards their goal.

### *Discussion of differences and similarities between the groups*

The similarity concerns the importance of clients' involvement which all focus groups point at – as a necessity for ownership of decisions and choices and for following the goals set up in guidance.

But not surprisingly the clients do not mention the differentiation of competences and abilities among clients to be actively involved, such as the managers and practitioners do – the clients probably would not participate in a focus group interview if they were not active. The managers and practitioners describe

various dilemmas and difficulties in making clients involved, such as unemployed clients involuntarily being part of a guidance (or advice) process, and gender and competence differences.

#### 2.4. Research Question 2: How can client involvement improve services (delivery)?

##### *Managers*

There is no systematized or formal evaluation of guidance in most of the institutions represented by the managers, no questionnaires, follow-up-interviews or -emails, which could give the institutions feedback on their guidance delivery. An exception is adult education centres where evaluation of courses and guidance is an obligation stated in legislation and evaluations are done via electronic questionnaires that measures satisfaction in general. The institutions that are combined educational and guidance institutions evaluate their courses as a whole, but not with specific focus on guidance. Other types of institutions do not have a tradition of evaluation of guidance – like some of the folk high schools. They believe that clients give individual feedback to practitioners about satisfaction, but they do not have procedures to collect feedback.

The managers cannot answer the question whether feedback actually *has* improved guidance in their institutions. At one of the day folk high schools they added integrated guidance to their guidance praxis after evaluation of their courses as a whole a few years ago.

They all think that higher degrees of involvement and systematized feedback could improve guidance delivery and praxis – they find the idea sympathetic: It would create more continuity for the service; it would create greater ownership among participants. One of the day folk high school managers would like to broaden the frames and conditions for the participants much more than is realistic given their contracts and tasks. And one manager point out, that higher degrees of involvement would demand continuous evaluations or user surveys, which is resource consuming.

At the same time they ask the question *which clients* should influence the guidance delivery: They refer to the great differentiation among their participants.

##### *Practitioners*

The practitioners answer in the same way as the managers: There is no systematized or formal evaluation of guidance in any of their institutions, no questionnaires, follow-up-interviews or -emails, which could give the institutions feedback on their guidance delivery. They also refer to course evaluation in institutions that are combined educational and guidance institutions, but with no specific focus on guidance, and mainly with focus on satisfaction. Clients also might give individual feedback to them about satisfaction, but they do not have procedures to collect feedback. And at the technical college there is a focus group, but it deals with general quality issues.

They all say that there is user influence in their institutions – meaning individually expressed wishes and needs from clients. Clients do not initiate systematic evaluations or group feedback, but to some extent group guidance sessions can result in change of activities.

During the discussion the day folk high school practitioners talk about the possibility of setting up focus group discussions among participants/clients at the end of courses with the purpose of collecting feedback on guidance procedures and methods.

All participants generally support the idea of higher user involvement and influence – they find it brilliant and optimal – for the same reasons as the managers: greater ownership and more empowerment of clients. They imagine greater involvement as subject for a development project or initiated by interviews with former

users about what they appreciated and what they would suggest changed. But at the same time they also refer to the differentiation among the clients: From clients used to being told what to do, expecting the same from the practitioner, to clients with resources and competences. They have clients who would be very motivated for influence, and others that would not be able to. So they too ask the question about which clients should influence guidance service.

### *Clients*

None of the clients have had the opportunity to formally evaluate guidance by use of questionnaires, follow-up interviews or emails. Some of them have given individual feedback to practitioners on their satisfaction or outcome of the guidance – on their own initiative, and some of them think that feedback is given as part of their daily interaction with teachers and guidance practitioners.

Many of them have filled out course evaluation questionnaires, but with no specific focus on guidance – one of them believes that the institution has no need of evaluations of guidance because it is obvious in daily praxis whether “it works or not”. And one of them finds it a very complex idea to evaluate the guidance she has received because she received so much help and was so much personally involved that it would be very difficult to get a critical or external approach to it.

They cannot answer the question about whether their feedback has improved guidance. They feel involved on a personal level, and one of them remembers, that she had a dialogue with the practitioner about the way she would like the guidance process to be, at the start of the process. The others answer no to the question on that – or they do not remember.

The clients think that they too have an individual responsibility concerning involvement in the guidance process; it is not only the practitioners’ responsibility. They consider it a difficult task if they together with other clients were to suggest improvements of the guidance service in the institutions they represent, but they believe that the institutions would listen to suggestions.

### *Discussion of differences and similarities between the groups*

With one exception all focus groups give the same answer to the question about evaluation of guidance delivery: There is no systematic or formal evaluation on an institutional level in the form of questionnaires, follow-up interviews or emails. Clients give individual feedback, but the feedback is not collected. They also all think that clients are influencing guidance on an individual level, but they cannot answer whether this has improved guidance service in general.

Managers and practitioners find the idea of higher degrees of client involvement inspiring and favourable, but at the same time they point at serious client barriers for high degrees of involvement. The idea of collective influence on guidance is rather strange to some of the clients – but also interesting.

## **2.5. Research Question 3 and 4: What ideas do clients and professionals have about clients’ future involvement? How might client involvement improve the outcome of guidance?**

### *Managers*

The managers answer the question about clients’ future involvement in a quite cautious way: “one could at least hope for it”. They think that it is necessary if the goals for increased competence levels among the low skilled and unskilled employees should be reached. When asked if they find it realistic they answer ‘no’, referring to lack of interest and willingness from financing bodies and authorities.

On the other hand they think higher degrees of involvement would increase motivation for education/competence development.

They have an interesting remark to the question on how client involvement might improve the outcome of guidance – that high degrees of client influence on guidance delivery might result in the same sort of delivery as the existing service, because of clients' satisfaction with the present form of delivery, or even in more strict rules and regulations.<sup>11</sup>

### *Practitioners*

The practitioners need to think a while about their answer to the question about clients' future involvement. In one of the interviews the participants liked the idea of a sort of 'an adult guidance place', with a variety of guidance service offers, and where the clients could form voluntary networks helping each other. But they have no suggestions on clients influence on the creation of such places/centres. And they also think that many adults would not use the place, for example adults with reading and writing problems.

When asked about whether adults could participate in defining future adult guidance delivery both practitioner focus groups find it a very good idea from an ideal point of view – it would make it possible to combine feedback on guidance services and professional knowledge from practitioners and professionals. They also point out that it must be adults with guidance experience that can contribute with their experiences. They mention net based guidance as another future possibility, but with no suggestions on how clients could influence on that.

They all think that higher degrees of involvement in future guidance ideally could give clients more responsibility for their own lives, greater anchoring, more satisfaction and increased self esteem, which in itself has an inclusion effect. Some of them think that on a local level 'user councils' could be a useful and realistic way of developing user involvement. In general they think it realistic with involvement up to level three, but not level four-five.

### *Clients*

As mentioned earlier one of the client focus groups was presented to this vision: "Imagine that you are in a consultation board for guidance. How did you end up there? What process took place? Who was there with you? What would you do to enhance guidance and guidance delivery in your local environment? What would your ideas on the service of guidance be? What would your ideas on policy making in guidance be? How did you feel about the process and being part of the consultation board?"

At first they found the vision strange but they started thinking about it, and they imagined that they were in the board because of their experience with (good) guidance and because the find guidance very important. The board should have a broad representation of competences and include professionals and persons with authority to make decisions. The male client would not want membership of such a board whereas all the female clients would want it and found it interesting.

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<sup>11</sup> Discussion about the nature of the taxonomy:

In one of the manager focus groups there was a discussion about the basic assumption underlying the taxonomy that higher degrees of involvement, meaning influence on the service, is of higher value for the clients. Some of the focus group members questioned that and argued that in the taxonomy forms and content of guidance is mixed with forms of influence. This assumption might lead to the conclusion that guidance without formal feedback to the service, partnership with services or influence on policies would be of less quality or value for the client.

When asked about participation in decision making on policies and strategies they found it difficult to answer as they did not know the current policy. But they liked the idea of an open adult guidance place/centre, with both physical access and access by phone and email, because they find the adult guidance system non-transparent and confusing. The adult guidance places should not replace guidance service in educational institutions, but be an additional all-round guidance possibility for adults.

The other focus group was presented to the idea too, but in a less concrete way, and they all found it interesting and exiting – some of them responded that they would want to be member of such a board/decision group in order to influence guidance services. They thought that they would have important information to offer, but they worried if they would be competent enough or have enough personal resources. On a local level they found the idea of arranging focus group discussions and feedback on guidance practice very good<sup>12</sup>, but with respect for changing needs in different client groups, and they would like a more targeted guidance evaluation at the end of their course. In their opinion it must be an obligation for the guidance practitioners to collect experiences and to learn and develop their practice. They pointed out that for them personally a combination of individual guidance (adapted to the individual client) and collective/group guidance is ideal.

Many of the clients said that they do not miss higher degrees of involvement; they were very satisfied with the guidance they receive and with the present level of involvement. The clients from day folk high schools expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with the guidance delivery<sup>13</sup>.

#### *Discussion of differences and similarities between the groups*

All three groups find it difficult to imagine higher degrees of user involvement in the future. On one hand they find it ideal and desirable, and on the other hand they find it unrealistic. The managers and practitioners find it unrealistic mainly for two reasons: The differentiation among clients, and the lack of interest from policy makers and financing bodies.

The clients consider it an interesting but somehow fairytale idea. Many of them said that they do not miss higher degrees of involvement; they were very satisfied with the guidance they receive and with the present level of involvement. But at the same time they expressed great interest in the idea of some sort of ‘user councils’ or groups where experiences could be shared with professionals.

Although managers and practitioners on a theoretical level approve the idea of involvement at level four and five they do not believe it could become a reality. But both groups mention possible advantages of higher degrees of involvement: Managers think higher degrees of involvement would increase motivation for education/competence development, and practitioners think that higher degrees of involvement in future guidance ideally could give clients more responsibility for their own lives, greater anchoring, more satisfaction and increased self esteem. Some of the practitioners think that on a local level ‘user councils’ could be a useful and realistic way of developing user involvement.

In general the responses from all three groups are contradictory – or ambivalent.

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<sup>12</sup> One of the day folk high school clients referred to this interview as an example of how a focus group discussion lead to reflections on guidance and experiences with guidance – reflections that he had not had before.

<sup>13</sup> Another day folk high school client added that policy makers and practitioners should work seriously on changing what he called the “shame-picture” connected with guidance – “we all need guidance from time to time in our lives”, he said, and he compared to seeing a psykologist, which has become socially accepted, while adult guidance is less accepted.



### 3. Perspectives and summary

#### 3.1. At which involvement level do the focus groups place their guidance delivery or participation?

When presented to the taxonomy the managers and some of the practitioners placed their client involvement at different levels in the taxonomy as part of the discussion. I have chosen to show this below, as I find it important for our study of Voice of Users.

##### *According to managers:*

Day folk high schools: Level 4 or 5 some years ago when conditions were better: participant groups and staff to some extent planned course content and guidance activities together, they were experimenting more at that time, working more in a sort of partnership. Now: probably level 2-3 meaning dialogues between clients and practitioners about which guidance the clients need and individual feedback from clients directly to the practitioner (no systematic feedback).

Folk high school: Level 2-3, individual feedback to practitioners and local workshops (not mentioned by the practitioner from the school).

Regional guidance centre: When adult guidance: Level 2: Individual feedback to practitioners on their service (when guidance of young clients: Level 3: Focus groups giving feedback).

Private actors: Level 1 due to contract obligations, time pressure and economic targets.

##### *According to practitioners:*

Day folk high schools: Level 1 and 2, to some extent level 3.

Folk high school: Level 1 and 2.

Adult education centre: Level 1, maybe sometimes level 2.

Regional guidance centre: Level 1 and 2.

Private actors: Level 1 to 3 – approaching 4 in relation to evaluation of course delivery combined with guidance (but with no specific focus on guidance), getting advice from participants about future courses.

##### *According to clients:*

They all point at level 1-2: Individual involvement and individual feedback to the practitioner.

Summing up: There is a slight tendency that managers estimate the degree of involvement to be higher than both practitioners and clients do, and there is a difference in estimation between managers and practitioners at private actors, but the differences are not significant. In general involvement is characterised by active involvement in information gathering and self-exploration, by individual oral feedback to practitioners, and by more sporadic use of group feedback.

#### 3.2. Summary

Summarizing on the research questions:

### *Definition and understanding of career guidance*

In all three groups the majority sees the term career guidance as problematic, although both managers and practitioners find the content of the term covering the purpose and praxis of most adult guidance. They find the term educational and vocational guidance much more precise and appropriate in a Danish context – a term that has been used in Danish legislation and policy making on guidance for decades.

They also all define guidance as helping clients make choices according to their potentials, wishes and dreams. Implied in this is an assumption that the client is a subject not an object in the guidance process – and that choices and options should not be forced onto the client.

One important difference is that especially the managers connect the aim of helping clients make their own choices through guidance with the term ‘realistic’ – realistic in connection to employment opportunities and future labour market needs.

### *Understanding of effective guidance service*

For all three groups guidance and effective guidance is connected to the individual client and her or his outcome of guidance – they do not connect it to the service organization or other structural issues or to formal qualifications of the practitioners. They all think of what is the result for the client.

The differences within this shared idea are mainly two: The managers and the practitioners are talking about ownership and qualified choices that make sense and are sustainable, and the clients talk about the necessity of empathy and support from the practitioner in order to help them make their own choices. The end target is shared, but in their explanations they focus on result versus process.

### *Are users actively involved in guidance?*

The similarity concerns the importance of clients’ involvement which all focus groups point at – as a necessity for ownership of decisions and choices and for following the goals set up in guidance.

But not surprisingly the clients do not mention the differentiation of competences and abilities among clients to be actively involved, such as the managers and practitioners do – the clients probably would not participate in a focus group interview if they were not active. The managers and practitioners describe various dilemmas and difficulties in making clients involved, such as unemployed clients involuntarily being part of a guidance (or advice) process, and gender and competence differences.

### *What ideas do clients and professionals have about clients’ future involvement, and how might client involvement improve the outcome of guidance?*

All three groups find it difficult to imagine higher degrees of user involvement in the future. On one hand they find it ideal and desirable, and on the other hand they find it unrealistic. The managers and practitioners find it unrealistic mainly for two reasons: The differentiation among clients, and the lack of interest from policy makers and financing bodies.

The clients consider it an interesting but somehow fairytale idea. Many of them said that they do not miss higher degrees of involvement; they were very satisfied with the guidance they receive and with the present level of involvement. But at the same time they expressed great interest in the idea of some sort of ‘user councils’ or groups where experiences could be shared with professionals.

Although managers and practitioners on a theoretical level approve the idea of involvement at level four and five they do not believe it could become a reality. But both groups mention possible advantages of higher degrees of involvement: Managers think higher degrees of involvement would increase motivation for education/competence development, and practitioners think that higher degrees of involvement in future guidance ideally could give clients more responsibility for their own lives, greater anchoring, more satisfaction and increased self esteem. Some of the practitioners think that on a local level 'user councils' could be a useful and realistic way of developing user involvement.

In general the responses from all three groups are contradictory – or ambivalent.