

Supporting Career Management Skills by Accompanying Decision-Making Processes through a Multidimensional Approach

Austria

1. Background

The motivation behind the initiative:

For many years, career guidance in the Austrian educational system has been based on a 3-layer model which focuses mainly on a combined delivery of educational and psychological assistance:

1. The preparation for an occupation or a profession is a basic educational concern and as such is to be found in different forms in school curricula. In addition to that, Grades 7 and 8 in all types of school feature the mandatory subject 'careers guidance'. The specific curriculum can be taught as a separate subject (with one hour per week), can be integrated into several subjects, or can be offered *en bloc* in form of projects days dedicated to the area.
2. Student counsellors can be found in all schools. These counsellors are specially trained teachers who provide career information and educational/occupational career counselling. They fulfil this task in addition to their teaching obligation.
3. The school psychology services offer professional individual careers counselling within or outside the school.

This support is complemented by other services provided outside schools by the public employment service and the social partners.

The OECD country report of 2003 had identified the following weaknesses in the provision of services to students:

- The quality of the integration of different inputs in the careers guidance lessons is sometimes poor.
- The training of student counsellors should be improved and the time for guidance activities should be extended.
- Coordination and co-operation with services outside schools should be improved.

The aim of the initiative described in this case study was to meet these challenges and to strengthen the role of school as an educational institution in the field of career guidance. A special focus is set on the acquisition of CMS by the pupils.

Linkages with LLG policy priorities:

- National Lifelong Guidance Strategy (www.lifelongguidance.at)
- Aims in the actual programme of the Austrian Federal Government (<http://www.bka.gv.at/site/3542/default.aspx>)

Participants:

- Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture
- Federal Ministry of Science and Research
- Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
- Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth
- Public Employment Service
- Social partners (Chamber of Labour, Economic Chamber, Federation of Austrian Industry)
- practitioners (career guidance teachers, school psychologists, psychological student counsellors)

Aims and targets:

- Sensitise schools: Supporting the decision-making processes of graduates as regards their educational and professional careers is an essential part of school quality.
- Quality assurance of the obligatory career guidance lessons.
- Improvement of coordination inside schools and of co-operation with external services.
- Support of the development of pupils' Career Management Skills

Target group:

- All teachers in secondary schools, especially headmasters.

Measures adopted to reach the objective:

- Development of a concept by a task force.
- Ministerial letter to all headmasters, followed by a Ministerial decree.
- Launching a specific website with information and materials to support schools.
- Improvement of teacher training in the field of career guidance.

2. Implementation

Strategy and actions:

In the Austrian lifelong guidance strategy, the implementation of basic competencies for educational career and life planning across all curricula is the first of five priorities.

The following competencies are particularly emphasised:

- The ability of self-reflection (particularly regarding abilities, interests, efficiency, intentions).
- Decision-making skills (including the ability to design decision-making processes and manage multi-dimensional, partly contradictory information as a bases for decision-making).
- The ability to search for information, and to evaluate such information.
- The ability to define and pursue one's own targets.

The acquisition of these competencies should occur through one's own learning experiences in the real situation of the decision-making process. Schools should support that in various ways, especially in the last two years of the compulsory educational cycle.

Fundamental support that should accompany these decision-making processes:

- Support should be given by the entire school staff, and not only by such specialists as student counsellors. Issues related to career management skills can be taken up in each and every subject.
- Support is given over two years.
- The focus of the support given by school shifts from a generic to an increasingly individualised and targeted one. The philosophy changes from the 'obligation to deliver' (the obligation of school) to the 'obligation to gain and collect' (the obligation of the individual).

Definition of a catalogue of obligatory measures:

A catalogue of obligatory measures was defined and proclaimed by decree (see http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18542/2009_17.pdf). The roles within the school which are linked with the decree were explained.

The range of support that is to be offered by schools includes the following:

- Contribution of all subjects to the development of Career Management Skills.
- The delivery of the obligatory curricular area 'careers guidance', whether this is taught as a separate subject, is integrated in other subjects, or through projects.
- Projects, excursions and organised work experiences to provide practical experiences, which entail a mandatory co-operation with organisations outside school, including Public Employment Services.
- Information and counselling by student counsellors.

Special roles and responsibilities include the following:

- The headmaster has the overall responsibility for the articulation and implementation of the strategy by means of which the school delivers the CMS-related curriculum.
- The head of school co-ordinates the careers guidance lessons himself, or asks a teacher to do this on his/her behalf.

- If ‘careers guidance’ is delivered as a separate subject, teachers need to be specially trained for the task. If it is integrated in all subjects, then all teachers have a responsibility and are expected to contribute within a framework of co-ordination and support.
- Information and individual counselling is provided by student counsellors.

Project ‘*Studienchecker*’ for pupils in higher education

In the field of higher education the basic concept related to Career Management Skills was adapted and is now being tested in form of a project called ‘*Studienchecker*’. One of the project’s specific targets is the strengthening of co-operation between guidance services in schools and universities (see www.studienchecker.at).

Production of accompanying materials for schools:

- Website with relevant information (including legal basis, materials and tools for training and counselling, contact addresses, and so on: see www.bmukk.gv.at/bo).
- Visualisation of references for developing career management skills in all curricula (see, for instance <http://www.schulpsychologie.at/bildungsinformation/nach-der-matura/lehrerinnen/unterrichtsmaterialien/>).

Teacher training:

- Definition of new standards for the training of student counsellors (see http://www.schulpsychologie.at/schuelerberatung/sbb_lehrgang.pdf).
- Development and testing of a new training curriculum for co-ordinators of career guidance lessons (http://www.ph-kaernten.ac.at/fileadmin/institute/primarstufe/BO_KO_Lehrgang_Curriculum.pdf).
- Order to the teacher training colleges to prioritise training in career guidance, particularly throughout 2010-2013 (<http://www.schulpsychologie.at/download/2009-22.pdf>).

3. Outcomes

- Lifelong Guidance is recognised as an important issue and is high on the country’s political agenda. This is reflected in a common decision by the whole Federal Government confirming the initiative.
- An extensive agreement regarding the objectives of the initiative was reached by policy makers and the social partners.
- The initiative has generated a lot of feedback from schools, most of which is positive.
- The information accompanying the initiative has been much sought after, and well used.
- A systematic evaluation of the measures that have already been implemented at school level has not yet been carried out.

The measures taken in connection with the initiative are multi-layered and need time to become effective. The goal is that every single school assumes its responsibility in this area, and develops its own implementation strategies.

4. Additional information

Name of contact: Dr. Gerhard Krötzl
Role: Head of the department for lifelong guidance policies
Organisation name: Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture
Address: A-1010 Wien, Freyung 1
Phone: +43531202582
Fax: +4353120812582
E-mail: gerhard.kroetzl@bmukk.gv.at
Website address: www.schulpsychologie.at
Documents: www.lifelongguidance.at, www.bmukk.gv.at/bo,
www.schulpsychologie.at/key2success, www.studienchecker.at