EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN FINLAND

Evaluation 5/2003
Foreword

The student counselling, guidance and information given in comprehensive school, senior secondary schools and vocational education institutions was evaluated in Finland in 2001–2002. In the evaluation special attention has been paid to pupil/student counselling in transitional stages, i.e. when moving from the sixth to the seventh grade of comprehensive school, from comprehensive school to senior secondary school or vocational education and from upper secondary education to work or higher education.

The first part of this report contains the overall design and main results of the evaluation. The evaluation was based on the model of evaluation of educational outcomes of the Finnish National Board of Education. The bases of the evaluation are the goals concerning student counselling in national curriculum guidelines, educational legislation and other education-related target documents. In the evaluation, the most central viewpoints of student counselling were personal counselling, educational counselling, career development and placement to further education and work, demand and availability of pupil/student counselling, pupil/student counselling in transitional stages of education and prevention of dropping out of education and social exclusion.

The second part of this report contains two articles consisting of the initiatives and developments taken by the Finnish authorities, especially by the National Board of Education as a result of the evaluation.

In the Appendix 1 there is a short description of the Finnish education system.
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An Evaluation of Educational Guidance and Counselling
In Basic Education, General Upper Secondary School
and Vocational Upper Secondary Education and During
Educational Transitions

Educational guidance and counselling is beginning to attract growing attention
both in Finland and in many other countries, manifested as various development
projects but also as a growing number of evaluation studies of educational
guidance and counselling provision. In Finland, educational guidance and
counselling offered in higher education institutions was evaluated in 2001
(Moitus et al. 2001). An evaluation of educational guidance and counselling in
basic education, general upper secondary school and vocational upper
secondary education was completed in 2002, while an evaluation of educational
guidance and counselling in adult education underway just now will be finished
in 2003. At the same time Finland is taking part, as one of 11 countries, in an
OECD assessment of national guidance and counselling services, that is
educational and career information, counselling and guidance systems. This
evaluation study will be completed in 2003.

What does this increased interest in educational guidance indicate? Within the
OECD, evaluation studies of educational guidance provision have stemmed
primarily from questions linked with transition from education to working life
and/or higher education; in other words, evaluations have focused particularly
on career counselling and careers guidance. Another international emphasis is
lifelong learning, which stresses the acquisition of study skills and the
emergence and maintenance of study motivation from childhood onwards
throughout adulthood. These emphases are linked particularly to the outcomes
of education: how shall education respond to social changes and demands
(OECD 2000, Sweet 2000)?
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Educational Guidance and Counselling in the Finnish Educational System

From a Finnish perspective, this growing topicality of educational guidance and counselling is a matter of, apart from the above changes in society and working life, also of changes in the educational system itself. In the 1980s and 1990s, the flexibility of the school system was enhanced on many levels. There is more scope for student choice in curricula in basic education, general upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education alike. Course-bound and non-graded teaching and periodisation of the school year have affected teaching arrangements and the organisation of the work of the school. New modes of learning and new learning environments have been introduced in education through network-based studying and by making work-based learning a part of vocational upper secondary education and training etc. There are changes also in how qualifications are taken: it is possible to take the Matriculation Examination in three phases instead of one, and in the vocational education there is an option to take all or parts of a vocational qualification as a competence-based qualification. Further and higher education tracks have similarly become more equal as a result of vocational qualifications now giving general eligibility for higher education (Table 1). On the other hand, these factors that increase flexibility have also meant that there is more need for and stronger demand for educational guidance and counselling.

On the other hand again, educational institutions now take more account of the pupil/student as an individual. Basic studies include optional subjects, while in general upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education students have been given more say in the planning of their studies through the introduction of personal study programmes. Providers of general and vocational upper secondary education are required to cooperate locally or regionally with each other and with higher education establishments, which expands the scope for individual choice. As a result of this networking, educational guidance and counselling must similarly be designed to reach beyond the boundaries of individual institutions, to operate within a regional network of educational establishments.
Such an opening up of educational structures affects also the status of educational guidance and counselling in curricula (Vuorinen et al. 2000). As a result of expanded student choice, educational guidance and counselling becomes the core of the curriculum, the nucleus around which what is known as the individual study programme, constructed from different courses and modules, takes shape. Accordingly, in the context of curriculum reforms educational guidance and counselling should be considered as a part of the strategic component of the curriculum, making it possible to legitimise guidance and counselling from a perspective broader than that provided by the scope of an individual study counsellor’s professional activities. To achieve this an educational establishment must have also a shared vision of the approaches, defined division of responsibilities among teachers and counsellors, and resources and administration of its educational guidance provision. Everyone should have access to guidance services, and there should be measures to ensure that the students and all staff are kept informed about the services available and about who is responsible for each given type of service (op cit 50–51).

TABLE 1. Reforms that increased the flexibility of education in the 1980s and the 1990s.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Curricula</th>
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<tr>
<td>course-bound/modular curricula</td>
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<tr>
<td>increased student choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>credit transfer</td>
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<td>taking courses outside one’s own educational establishment</td>
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<td>individual study programmes</td>
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<tr>
<th>Teaching</th>
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<tr>
<td>more study projects that cut across subject and institutional boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>distance education, network-based education and other forms of independent studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>incorporating work-based learning periods into vocational upper secondary education</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teaching arrangements and scheduling of studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>periodisation</td>
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<td>non-graded teaching, modular studies</td>
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</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>changes stemming from an integrated comprehensive school in basic education</th>
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<tr>
<td>inter-institutional cooperation at regional level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>possibility to take Matriculation Examination in phases</td>
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<td>skills tests as a part of vocational qualifications</td>
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<td>Educational tracks</td>
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<td>polytechnics as a new higher education track</td>
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<td>expansion of the eligibility for higher education gained in vocational upper secondary education</td>
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<td>Internationalisation</td>
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<td>international student and trainee exchange</td>
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Internationalisation is another factor that is broadening the range of educational opportunities, with the result that homes, too, need more information about these opportunities and the content of study programmes in order to help their children and young people to choose between the options available to them.

Evaluating Educational Guidance and Counselling

The Finnish National Board of Education evaluated educational guidance and counselling provision in 2001—2002, publishing its findings in the report Opinto-ohjauksen tila 2002 (Numminen et al. 2002). The evaluation study covers educational guidance and counselling in basic education, general upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education while paying attention also to educational transitions, or, more specifically, to transition from grade 6 to grade 7 in basic education, transition from basic education to general upper secondary school or vocational upper secondary education, and transition from upper secondary education to higher education or working life.
Educational guidance and counselling evaluation was based on the Model for Evaluating Educational Outcomes (Koulutuksen tuloksellisuuden arviointimalli, 1998) used by the National Board of Education, which has the following three component areas:

- **effectiveness**, or how effectively the knowledge and skills produced by education promote individual learning on the one hand and the development of working life and the rest of society on the other;
- **efficiency**, or how well and functionally teaching provision has been organised and how flexibly the education system and its various parts operate; and
- **financial accountability**, or how optimally the funds allocated to education have been used (Figure 2).
An evaluation of the efficiency of educational guidance and counselling assesses among other things the quality and availability of guidance and counselling and how well guidance provision serves the needs of different students; how up to date it is and how responsive it is to the student on the one hand and to changes in education and the world of work on the other; what are its pedagogic arrangements and methods; how up to date they are and how well they work; the guidance staff and the management culture of the educational establishment; and external conditions such as the physical facilities (Figure 2).
Evaluating the effectiveness of educational guidance and counselling involves two main viewpoints, that of the individual and that of the school system. Assessment targets such things as correspondence between the need for and the provision of guidance, that is, how well educational guidance and counselling is able to promote the development of learning-to-learn skills and lifelong learning skills. Evaluations of each type of school appraised also the general smoothness of the study path and paid attention to how well prepared the students are for making decisions about further studies and about entering working life. From the point of view of the school system this is a matter of how smoothly educational transitions take place.

As regards the financial accountability of educational guidance, here evaluation considers the amount and targeting of the resources allocated to educational guidance and counselling. This involves taking a look among other things at the number of pupils/students under the supervision of study counsellors in different school types, the development of educational guidance measures and so on.

Assessments of educational guidance and counselling draw their evaluation criteria primarily from the goals defined in educational legislation, the curriculum guidelines, the Development and Research Plan for Education by Ministry of Education and other documents that set targets for education and educational guidance and counselling. During evaluation they served as the source from which the evaluation questions were derived as a basis for designing the evaluation indicators.

Right to Educational Guidance and counselling

The 1998 educational legislation strengthened the position of educational guidance by including the right to pupil/student guidance and counselling into the regulations of all school types. Pupils in basic education and students in general upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education are all equally entitled to instruction and educational guidance. According to the regulations, educational guidance is delivered as guidance listed in the distribution of classroom hours, implemented in most cases as classroom or small group teaching, with additional individual and other guidance services also provided.
The curriculum reforms of the 1990s have retained the central aims of the educational guidance provision of the 1980s, but the curriculum guidelines articulated their content in more general terms; in other ways, too, the number of instructions relating to educational guidance was reduced. This trend is turning in the curriculum guidelines prepared in accordance with the 1998 educational legislation. The curriculum guidelines governing vocational qualifications defines the aims of educational guidance with greater clarity while also making the instructions concerning its provision more binding than before (e.g. the Vocational Qualification in Metalwork and Machinery 2000, 165, 173). This is the trend also in the basic education and general upper secondary school curricula which are being revised just now.

Evaluation Design

Figure 3 presents a design for evaluating educational guidance and counselling provision. The central component areas representing the condition of educational guidance and counselling, presented in the figure as concentric circles, were selected on the basis of an analysis of the relevant regulations and other documents that set targets for educational guidance and counselling. To ensure many-sided assessment and explore the subject in greater depth, the different component areas of educational guidance and counselling were considered from the perspective of several agent groups, described in the sectors of the figure. The figure does not show the third level of evaluation, which describes different types of educational establishments. The concentric circles in the figure are arranged in an order that gives prominence to the perspective of the educational system. This is why the transition phases and the prevention of social exclusion are at the centre and why the pupil’s perspective becomes more prominent as we approach the margins. The size of each sector was determined with a view to placing emphasis particularly on the viewpoint of the pupil/student.
Some of the component areas of evaluation belong to the educational system level, some to the individual level:

1) *Educational transition phases or transitions* are critical stages of an educational career where the pupil/student is more at risk of dropping out of education than at other times during their schooling. Successful transitions can be seen as one indicator that educational guidance and counselling is working.

2) *Exclusion* is often linked with educational transitions and with dropping out. The evaluation study considered the educational guidance and counselling tools developed by study counsellors and educational institutions for the early identification and prevention of exclusion.
3) A correspondence between the need for and provision of educational guidance and counselling is based on objectives defined in educational legislation stipulating that there must be an adequate provision of educational guidance and counselling. Educational guidance and counselling and associated provision of other types of guidance and counselling can be seen as a service system within an educational establishment intended to help the student to do well in their studies, promote their well-being and reduce the risk of their exclusion from education.

4) Promoting personal growth and development is a core area of educational guidance and counselling. The aim is to increase the student’s self-knowledge and support the pupil/student as they look for their own strengths; on the one hand nurturing their individuality, on the other hand preparing them for a life as a member of society and enhancing their social skills. Because fostering the student’s growth and development is a task for the school community as a whole, evaluation considers also how well the guidance and counselling is seen as a part of the overall school practices.

5) Helping the pupil/student to make decisions concerning their vocational orientation and guiding their career choice is a long-term process. As set down in the curriculum guidelines, it can start as early as in the lower grades of basic education in the form of general familiarisation with society and introduction to working life and occupations, continuing throughout the upper classes and upper secondary education and even later on. Educational choices - choosing, in upper secondary education, one’s educational track and, in vocational upper secondary education, one’s study field - are particularly critical stages of this process. Students face similar choices also when they complete general upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education and either continue their studies or enter working life. How difficult the career choice process is is shown within the school system in such things as failure to enter upper secondary education, dropping out or switching programmes and, at the level of the school system, also as multiple education.
6) The aim of guidance on study skills and the provision of study support is to familiarise the pupil/student with learning, help them to find their own learning style and become aware of any personal learning difficulties, and reinforce their identity as a learner and prepare them for lifelong learning. This component area of guidance and counselling involves also monitoring the student’s study path within each school form and, to some degree, also across the transitions and helping them to make the different choices to be made during their education.

Evaluation Perspectives

The second part of the evaluation design for educational guidance and counselling provision consists of different perspectives on guidance and counselling. The pupil/student perspective describes how educational guidance and counselling appears from the viewpoint of the individual, how it meets the student’s need for support, how it has been organised, and how well the counselling services are available.

Study counsellors, again, open up a perspective on the expertise needed in educational guidance and counselling, on the conditions in which guidance and counselling is delivered, and on how guidance and counselling is organised within an educational establishment and on its status there. The principal brings a perspective on how educational guidance and counselling works as a part of the operations and activities of the educational establishment as a whole and how far it is able to contribute to the achievement of general educational objectives.

The principal is also obliged appraise the school as a guidance and counselling community, that is, judge how successfully the school community as a whole and all the teachers are able to promote student growth and learning and, further, what is the status of educational guidance and counselling in the context of school management.

The education provider’s perspective on educational guidance and counselling is linked with strategic management and regional questions and the allocation of resources for education.

The parents’ perspective is connected with how the parents are informed about the pupil’s school attendance, studies and choices, and what kind of support they assume their child is receiving at school.
Gathering the Evaluation Data

The evaluation surveys were carried out mainly in September 2001. They covered, retrospectively, educational guidance and counselling delivered in the school year 2000–2001. The evaluation materials consisted of questionnaire data collected from provincial administrative boards (N=5), education providers (N=138), principals/subject area directors of schools (N=460), study counsellors (N=502), pupils/students (N=8,147) and parents (N=4,050), and of more in-depth interview materials gathered at regional level and, additionally, of the sections on educational guidance and counselling in the school curricula. With a view to gaining information on the transition phases, the surveys were carried out at a time when the pupils had just made a transition; for example, the pupils asked to evaluate educational guidance and counselling in the upper classes of basic education had just started their first year of study in general upper secondary school or vocational upper secondary education. The evaluation study surveyed 376 educational establishments. The sample was nationally representative.

The evaluation data were used to calculate a number of summed variables, the intention being to employ this condensed group of summed variables to describe the organisation of educational guidance and counselling provision and compare the various types of material making up the data and thus assess the efficacy of educational guidance and counselling. The summed variables were calculated from questions covering each area of educational guidance and counselling separately for each pupil/student group, the study counsellors, the principals and the education providers. Accordingly, different groups had summed variables with the same names and, on principle, same contents (see Appendix A), which made possible comparison across the different types of material and contributed to a many-sided interpretation.

Evaluation Findings

Because the evaluation study was based on a multilevel design, the findings can similarly be considered from the point of view of several different agent groups. However, it is not possible here to discuss the findings in detail or from the viewpoint of any individual agent group. Instead, we present below, on the basis of the publication Numminen and others 2002, the most central results of the evaluation study as what may be called an overall assessment.
There are serious shortcomings regarding access to educational guidance and counselling.

Access to educational guidance and counselling was assessed as follows: 1) determining the number of pupils/students under the charge of an individual study counsellor; 2) looking at the pupils’/students’, the study counsellors’ and the principals’ evaluations of how easily available educational guidance and counselling was; and 3) ascertaining how much educational guidance and counselling the pupils/students had received or made use of.

In basic education grades 7–9, full-time study counsellors were responsible for an average of 245, part-time study counsellors for 93 pupils. The number of pupils ranged between 7 and 530. In general upper secondary schools, full-time study counsellors were in charge of an average of 288, part-time study counsellors 182 students, ranging between 16 and 685. In vocational upper secondary education establishments, full-time study counsellors were responsible for an average of 510 students, while even part-time counsellors looked after some 220 students. The number of students ranged between 7 and 1,042.

In those schools where the study counsellor has a great number of students, more than 300, at least some the pupils/students will fail to receive enough individual guidance and counselling. About a fifth of the comprehensives, a little less than a third of the general upper secondary schools and a good third of the vocational upper secondary education establishments covered in the study belonged to this category. The pupils/students similarly assessed access to guidance and counselling as at best moderate. At the same time, however, the students reported that when needed they were able to make a prompt appointment, which may be assumed to reflect the study counsellors’ responsiveness to the student’s needs. However, such first aid cannot serve as the foundation of educational guidance and counselling provision.

Adequate support for studies and personal development is not available to all pupils/students.

According to Finnish school legislation (Acts 628/98, 629/98, 630/98), a pupil/student has the right to an adequate provision of personal and other guidance and counselling. The evaluation findings show that this objective is not achieved.
As the basic education pupils saw it, they had at most moderate access to educational guidance and counselling (the average value of the summed variable was 3.1 on a 1–5 scale), while the student counsellors rated access lower (average value 2.9) and the principals considered it fairly good (average value 3.7).

In basic education, about a fifth (19%) of the pupils had never received or made use of individual guidance and counselling during grades 7–9. Boys and pupils oriented towards vocational upper secondary education were overrepresented in this group, and the group’s school achievement was a little lower than that of the other pupils. It should be noted here that pupils who made no use of educational guidance and counselling included also children who did well at school. Thus, reasons for not receiving or using educational guidance and counselling can vary. Girls received or made use of personal educational guidance and counselling a little more than boys.

The general upper secondary school students’ assessments of access to educational guidance and counselling ranged between rather poor and moderate (average value 2.7). The study counsellors rated access as moderate (average 2.9). The difference is statistically significant. The principals gave no assessment of this subject. A good third (36%) of the students thought that they had received an adequate or fairly adequate amount of individual guidance and counselling, but nearly two fifths (39%) of them considered that they had not been provided with anything like enough guidance and counselling. There were regional differences in the availability of educational guidance and counselling, with students attending general upper secondary schools in urban areas and in country municipalities reporting better access to educational guidance and counselling than students attending general upper secondary schools in smaller towns. This is a statistically significant difference. In the present data, no link was found between the size of a general upper secondary school and the availability of educational guidance and counselling.

The vocational students’ assessments of access to educational guidance and counselling ranged between rather poor and moderate (average value 2.8). The study counsellors rated access considerably higher (average value 3.3). A good third (38%) of the students thought that they had received an adequate or fairly adequate amount of individual guidance and counselling, but on the other hand, nearly half of them (43%) considered that they had not been given enough guidance and counselling.

\(^1\) 5=very good/much, 4=fairly well/quite a lot, 3=tolerably well/moderately, 2=rather poorly/not much, 1=not at all
While access to educational guidance and counselling was not, generally speaking, very easy, a good two thirds of the comprehensive school pupils, three fourths of the general upper secondary school students and a good tenth of the vocational students considered that they were able to make an appointment for seeing the study counsellor immediately or within a few days. The proportion of pupils/students who reported that it was impossible to make an appointment for individual guidance and counselling even when they need it was 4 per cent in basic education, 3 per cent in vocational upper secondary education and zero in general upper secondary school. Waiting times might also draw out, up to as much as a month. The study counsellors similarly reported that there are students - only a few per cent, to be sure - who, because of a lack of time, receive no individual guidance and counselling even when they need it.

**Guidance and counselling on further studies successful, lowest standards found in guidance and counselling on study skills, problems with guidance and counselling on vocational orientation.**

The pupils/students, study counsellors, principals and education providers were asked how successfully the core tasks of educational guidance and counselling set in the curriculum guidelines are being fulfilled: 1) guidance and counselling on personal growth and development, 2) guidance and counselling on study skills and studying, 3) guidance and counselling on vocational orientation and 4) guidance and counselling on further studies.

As regards guidance and counselling on personal growth and development, the pupils/students rated its provision as between rather poor and moderate (the assessments ranged from 2.5 to 3.5). The study counsellor did serve as a source of support but in basic education for example, only one in ten pupils considered that the other teachers in their school had supported their personal growth.

The pupils/students rated the provision of guidance and counselling on study skills as being between rather poor and moderate. To generalise, a fourth of the general upper secondary school students and vocational students at most had received significant help with their learning, developing their study methods and setting themselves study goals. The general upper secondary school students assessed guidance and counselling on study skills and studying at 2.2, the vocational students at 2.0 and the basic education pupils at 3.5–3.9.
The evaluation study found that guidance and counselling on vocational orientation is one of the problem areas at school. In all types of school the pupils/students were well aware of the importance of career choice and valued various forms of familiarisation with working life and occupations. However, the evaluation study revealed, in many ways, a great need felt among basic education pupils in particular for knowledge about the world of work and occupations. There was not enough information on these subjects, while ways of introducing students to working life are similarly in need of development. According to the students, there was abundant information on qualifications, but the content of occupations and of the job tasks entailed by them remained hazy. This is a serious shortcoming, significant also from a societal perspective.

Even though in basic education career counselling starts as early as in grade 7 and focuses on grade 9, there were children who were still unclear about their career choice when they left comprehensive school, and this included pupils who had opted for vocational education. Half the pupils who had opted for general upper secondary school explained their decision by saying that it would give them more time to choose a career. Of those who had opted for vocational upper secondary education, one in ten reported that they had made their choice only during the nationwide joint application system; moreover, among this student group only a good tenth (15%) believed that they had found their own field, about a third (30%) were uncertain about the matter and more than a half said that their chosen study field was not really what they wanted. Thus, many students already in vocational upper secondary education are still in need of guidance and counselling on their vocational orientation.

Most general upper secondary school students similarly thought that they had not been given enough information on working life and occupations; two thirds had had no working life orientation periods. Other studies also support the view that students do not accumulate enough experience of the world of work during their studies and that the impact of the job-related information integrated into different school subjects and of the information delivered during educational guidance and counselling lessons tends to remain superficial.

There is an obvious need to develop the methods and approaches of career counselling. Reaching clarity about a career for oneself is a long-term process that should begin early; there should also be stronger parent involvement. As it is, it was not from school but from their own children that the parents learned most about further and higher education options and career choice. An example might be provided by development discussions around career choice between the study counsellor, the pupil and the parents conducted in some
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... comprehensive schools. However, the current resources are too limited for such a method.

*Guidance and counselling on further studies* is rated high by all student groups (average value 3.3–4.1). The study counsellors and the principals similarly considered that it worked well. The parents’ assessment of how well they had been informed about their children’s further and higher education options was a little lower (average value 2.9).

**Monitoring and feedback systems are flawed. The principals and study counsellors rate the delivery of educational guidance and counselling higher than the students.**

Educational legislation requires education providers to evaluate their own operations. As regards schools’ provision of educational guidance and counselling, the situation is unsatisfactory. Only about a third of the educational establishments had conducted a self-assessment of their educational guidance and counselling provision. Less than half the general upper secondary schools and more than half the comprehensive schools and vocational upper secondary education institutions had a system for monitoring pupils/students who had left the school to take up further studies elsewhere or who had dropped out. However, the principals’ answers suggest that monitoring is not systematic. Nor are the schools’ internal systems for monitoring and collecting feedback on their educational guidance and counselling provision working. This is indicated among other things by the great differences in answers concerning the functioning of educational guidance and counselling provision between the pupils/students and the principals themselves. It was also repeatedly found that the study counsellors rated the delivery of educational guidance and counselling higher than the students, the principals higher than the study counsellors. A part of these differences are explained by different perspectives. However, they may also stem from the students’ views about, for example, access to educational guidance and counselling never reaching the principal. Accordingly, when the principals make decisions about educational guidance and counselling, they do it on grounds not based on pupil/student demand and need for educational guidance and counselling.
Factors that increase the flexibility of the school system have heightened demand and the need for educational guidance and counselling. Individual study programmes are still an option only for the few.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Finnish school system was made more flexible among other things by expanding student choice in curricula, by introducing course-form and non-graded teaching, by making it possible to take the Matriculation Examination in several phases instead of one etc. These factors which have increased the flexibility of the educational system have simultaneously increased demand for and the need for educational guidance and counselling, something that schools have not taken into account when making decisions about resources for educational guidance and counselling. Logically, this increased need for guidance and counselling should have led to a reduction in the number of pupils/students per study counsellor. What has happened instead is that the figures for pupils/students per study counsellor have remained the same since 1996.

The principals considered that the need for educational guidance and counselling had grown, among other things because of changes in the school system and because pupils/students and families are facing more problems, possibly as a result of the 1990s depression in Finland. No principal suggested that there was less need for educational guidance and counselling. It was observed above that a substantial number of pupils/students never received the educational guidance and counselling that they needed. According to the study counsellors, the most important reason for this was a lack of time.

Nor has individual choice been adequately implemented. According to educational legislation, general upper secondary school and vocational students have the right to take courses delivered in other educational establishments. Such options were still far from universally available.

More than one out of ten students (13% in general upper secondary school, 17% in vocational upper secondary education institutions) reported that it was not possible, in their school, to take courses offered in other educational establishments. A personal study programme had been prepared for an average of half the general upper secondary school students and about a fifth of the vocational students. While the questions are to a degree open to various interpretations, the findings do show that a sizable number of students consider that they have little say in how their studies are planned. This means passing up an important opportunity to teach students to construct their own study programmes, an indispensable skill particularly from the perspective of lifelong learning skills.
These results are supported by the principals’ answers, which indicate that in practice, preconditions for choosing studies in other educational establishments had been created in about half the general upper secondary schools and in 80 per cent of the vocational upper secondary education institutions.

**Developing guidance and counselling environments - using IT to enhance individual guidance and counselling.**

The growing need for educational guidance and counselling cannot be met solely by increasing classroom-based or individual guidance and counselling services, although there is an obvious and substantial need to increase resources also in these areas in order to achieve the targets set in educational legislation concerning the provision of all students with adequate educational guidance and counselling.

International evaluation studies (the OECD 2001–2003 policy evaluation of guidance and counselling provision in several countries, preliminary information) foreground the construction, not only for adults but also for young people, of guidance and counselling environments that exploit IT. Thus, in Finland this would mean starting projects for developing IT-based guidance and counselling environments in basic education, general upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education. Launching such projects cannot be left to the development initiative of schools or individual study counsellors alone because designing guidance and counselling environments of a new kind demands not only resources and expertise in guidance and counselling contents but also a type of familiarity with using IT in guidance and counselling that study counsellors, as revealed by this evaluation, generally lack. As assessed by the education providers, principals and study counsellors, the standard of IT expertise and facilities in schools are moderate (average value 2.7–3.7), but only about half of the study counsellors estimated that they had the knowledge and skills to use IT in their guidance and counselling activities. The counsellors rated their IT skills as nearly their weakest competence area.

There are study materials that draw on IT, but according to the study counsellors they are not very useful. Most of them have been designed for expert use, not with the needs of comprehensive school-age children in mind.
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The job of a study counsellor: several irons in the fire, all of them important. Study counsellors’ qualifications, numerical adequacy and competence level.

As compared to studies carried out in the early 1990s, today’s study counsellors are more highly trained. By contrast, their qualification level cannot be considered satisfactory. Of full-time study counsellors, 79 per cent had completed the training required of a study counsellor but of all persons giving guidance and counselling only half had completed the relevant studies. In other words, nearly half (43%) of all study counsellors were unqualified. The situation is particularly worrying among recently appointed study counsellors, of whom 80 per cent had no training in educational guidance and counselling. Thus, those entrusted with the duties of a study counsellor, very much a job for an expert, start their career, as a rule, without appropriate training.

The findings of the evaluation study suggest that the study counsellors are strongly committed to their work. In all school types, the study counsellor’s work consisted of a great number of tasks, many of them without any link with the core areas of educational guidance and counselling or, in the first place, with educational guidance and counselling as such, such as substituting for teachers, supervisory duties, or preparing the school schedule. One reason behind this multiplicity of tasks making up the study counsellor’s job is that in an educational establishment, the study counsellor is often the only person, apart from the principal, working under the total work hours system who can, as a part of the division of labour within the school, easily be assigned other than teaching duties.

The problem is that even the study counsellors themselves rated as fairly important tasks that are secondary from the perspective of educational guidance and counselling. This suggests that study counsellors feel also more generally responsibility for the overall functioning of their schools. It is obvious that the current division of responsibilities within educational establishments does not allow the study counsellors possibility to concentrate on their core tasks and on developing educational guidance and counselling, particularly in a situation where there is more need for guidance and counselling than there are work hours for delivering it and at a time when guidance and counselling needs are growing. The amount of overtime was, similarly, worryingly large.

Familiarity with international work and study opportunities and IT skills emerged as the competence areas that the study counsellors considered their weakest. Study counsellors serving in basic education knew considerably less
about vocational upper secondary education than they did about general upper secondary school, and according to them there was also less information available on vocational upper secondary education than on general upper secondary school. This situation must be considered a serious shortcoming from the perspective both of guidance and counselling provision and of parity of esteem between the two educational tracks.

A failure to implement guidance and counselling as a task belonging to all teachers.

The curriculum guidelines define guidance and counselling as a task belonging to all teachers, with the study counsellor bearing main responsibility for its design. The evaluation study took a look at the educational establishment as a whole as a guidance and counselling community, among other things by asking the principals whether their school had a guidance and counselling plan and how far all teachers, in the context of teaching their own subjects, guided studying or otherwise assumed responsibility for supporting students.

The principals and study counsellors rated their educational establishments as at best moderately successful as guidance communities (average value 2.9–3.3). Only one basic education pupil in ten considered that the other teachers in their school guided studying or pupils’ personal growth, with help with learning difficulties in particularly short supply. While the pupils’ views are to a degree open to interpretation, their experience cannot be disputed. The principals similarly judged the guidance and counselling given by the other teachers inadequate.

In practice, many teachers spontaneously guide and support, as a part of their everyday professional activities in the classroom, their pupils/students. However, the evaluation findings suggest that educational guidance and counselling in general and guidance and counselling on studying and study skills in particular has not been defined, in schools’ division of responsibilities, with sufficient clarity as a duty of all teachers. In reality, the whole school community is responsible for the students’ studies and for ensuring that their plans for further studies are realised, whether the various members of the community make their guidance and counselling contribution systematically or unconsciously.
Poor provision of the skills needed for lifelong learning.

The objectives set in the curriculum guidelines include the provision of lifelong learning skills. In the present context this means fostering a positive attitude towards studying, self-directedness in one’s studies, mastery of independent study skills, and an ability to pursue studies also over information networks.

Educational guidance and counselling has been successful in promoting lifelong learning skills to the extent that the assessment of self-directedness calculated from the questions about pupil/student self-directedness was moderately good (average value 3.4–3.6). Guidance and counselling on further studies was, in the opinion of the students, the study counsellors and the principals alike, another strongest area of educational guidance and counselling.

However, it must be considered as a shortcoming that in general upper secondary school and in vocational upper secondary education, far from all students have gained experience of extensive independent studies as measured as a block of studies consisting of at least a course or a credit (study week). A little less than half the general upper secondary school students and a third of the vocational students had completed independent studies of this scope, while as regards network-based studying, only 1.4 per cent of the general upper secondary school students and 3.3 per cent of the vocational students had finished studies of similar extent. Moreover, there were educational establishments where students simply had no access to network-based studies. One in four general upper secondary school principals and half the vocational upper secondary education establishment principals reported that network-based studies were not possible in their school. The last few years have seen a great deal of resources invested in what are known as virtual school or network-based instruction projects at the same time as teachers have been given training in IT with the aim of, among other things, providing support for and guidance and counselling on network-based studying. According to the evaluation findings, a good many of the educational institutions are yet to progress beyond the first stages of these developments.

Educational transitions - successful study paths or dropping out?

The evaluation study covered three central transitions within the Finnish school system: 1) transition from grade 6 to grade 7 in basic education; 2) transition from basic education to general upper secondary school or vocational upper secondary education; and 3) transition from general upper secondary school or vocational upper secondary education to higher education and/or working life. The evaluation study considered these transitions from two perspectives,
that of the individual and that of the school system. From the individual’s perspective, the question is whether the pupil/student is given enough information and support to help them with the choices that must be made during these transitions. The perspective of the school system concerns the question of how smoothly such transitions are accomplished.

The schools pay many-sided attention to the transition from grade 6 to grade 7 in basic education, using several approaches to familiarising the pupils and their parents with studying in the upper classes. However, depending on the subject, between about a third and as many as more than half the parents considered that they had been poorly informed about their child’s transition to grade 7. According to the principals’ assessment, at this stage an average of 5–7 per cent of the pupils are not, in practice, sufficiently mature to make the transition to studies at the upper level of comprehensive school.

The pupils are prepared for the transition from basic education to general upper secondary school or vocational upper secondary education, as a part of educational guidance and counselling provision, throughout the grades 7–9. The evaluation study shows that comprehensive schools took good care over guiding the pupils through the process of applying for upper secondary education through the nationwide joint application system, while more than three in four study counsellors working in basic education gave their pupils what is known as post-application guidance and counselling on finding a student place. Nevertheless, there are many student groups that have obviously not been adequately supported in their choices because they have not been able to make decisions on their education: 1) pupils who leave basic education without plans for further studies; 2) pupils who move to general upper secondary school without definite plans only because they want to have more time to decide about a career; and 3) pupils who, after entering vocational upper secondary education, abandon their studies or switch to another study field because their initial choice proved wrong. Yearly, this is a group of some 8,5001 young people (pupils who participate in additional 10th form and pupils who fail to apply for upper secondary education or take up their student place there).

As was pointed out above in the section discussing guidance and counselling on vocational orientation, at the start of their upper secondary education a substantial number of students were, both in general upper secondary school and in upper secondary vocational education, still uncertain about their (career) choice. Addressing transition problems presupposes both resources and the further development both of the methods of and the study materials used in guidance and counselling on vocational orientation.

1 The size of age cohort in Finland is about 65,000.
Parity of esteem between the general upper secondary school track and the vocational track is one of the questions involved in this particular transition. The evaluation study revealed a clear disparity in the esteem accorded to these two tracks. The principals and study counsellors of general upper secondary schools reported smoother cooperation with educational guidance and counselling provision in basic education than did the principals and study counsellors of vocational upper secondary education establishments. Further, there were gaps in the knowledge that the study counsellors working in basic education had of vocational upper secondary education. The study counsellors themselves considered that they had been more poorly informed about vocational education than about general upper secondary education. These gaps affect also study counsellors’ ability to provide their guidance and pupils or students with information on vocational education. Similarly, the parents of pupils in the final grade of basic education learned more about general upper secondary school than about vocational upper secondary education.

Among the questions associated with the transition from general upper secondary school or vocational upper secondary education to higher education and/or working life are the emergence of definite plans for further studies and possession of the skills needed to apply for a student place or a job. The problems related to this specific transition include prolongation of upper secondary studies, a lack of well-defined plans for further studies, problems with finding a student place in higher education and/or with finding a job. The evaluation study found that according to the principals and study counsellors, students were well acquainted with options for further studies but that less than half the students themselves considered that they had been well informed about the various higher education opportunities. This finding may in part stem from the point of time at which the evaluation was carried out.

As regards students participating in additional 10th form, only some of them had been prepared a personal study programme as stipulated in the curriculum guidelines, and additional 10th form is still being delivered partly as graded/classroom-based teaching. The reason may lie in parallel student needs, such as raising their grades, but regardless of this, a personal study programme is a factor that, because it promotes a young person’s growth and development and fosters a goal-directed approach to studying, cannot be passed over. The principals estimated that three students in four had a completed plan for further studies by the conclusion of their additional 10th form. There was no adequate monitoring of students who dropped out of the additional 10th form programme.
Preventing social exclusion - student monitoring leaves much to be desired.

The evaluation study did not include those young people who failed to gain a school-leaving certificate from basic education or never entered upper secondary education. According to other research, it is young people without vocational education who are most at risk of exclusion.

The evaluation study looked at the potential and means that educational guidance and counselling and educational establishments have to prevent exclusion. The study counsellors estimated that an average of 3.5 per cent of pupils in basic education and 8.5 per cent of students in vocational education are at risk of dropping out of or being excluded from education. According to the estimate of the basic education principals, an average of 5–7 per cent of their pupils were not mature enough to move from grade 6 to studies at the upper level of comprehensive school, while some 7 per cent of comprehensive-school pupils lacked the knowledge and skills adequate for a move to upper secondary education. As for identifying exclusion, the study counsellors paid attention to student absences; generally speaking, absences were monitored satisfactorily, though not in all schools covered in the study.

The most central means used by the educational establishments to prevent exclusion was the pupil/student welfare team, which operated in nearly all comprehensives, in 80 per cent of the vocational upper secondary education establishments and in half the general upper secondary schools. The evaluation study examined also the resources for pupil/student welfare available in the educational institutions. On average, a little less than half of them had access to the services of a school social worker, while the services of a school psychologists were even less common. This is problematic not only because it means an inadequate provision of such services but also because in their absence the study counsellors often found themselves performing also duties that are normally the domain of a school social worker or psychologist. Such a situation cannot be considered even tolerable.

All education providers (96 %) saw educational guidance and counselling as an important tool for preventing exclusion but as against that, substantially fewer (67 %) considered that they had allocated educational guidance and counselling adequate resources.
The monitoring systems operated by the education providers and the comprehensive schools did not reach pupils belonging to the above-mentioned at-risk groups, nor were the schools aware of their later placement in education or working life or such information was random. It should be noted here that Finnish schools have no regulatory obligation to monitor their pupils/students; at the same time, such monitoring might contribute to the schools' own self-assessment.
Appendix A

a) *Summed variables describing the delivery and condition of educational guidance and counselling, which include:*

1) guidance and counselling on growth and development
2) guidance and counselling on study skills and studying
3) guidance and counselling on vocational orientation
4) guidance and counselling on further studies
5) choosing a school
6) choosing a study field/educational track
7) choosing subjects
8) individual study programmes
9) access to educational guidance and counselling
10) transition in basic education from grade 6 to grade 7
11) transition from basic education to upper secondary education
12) transition from upper secondary education to working life/higher education
13) preventing exclusion.

b) *Summed variables describing the preconditions and situation of educational guidance and counselling provision, which include:*

14) attitudes towards studying
15) quality of educational guidance and counselling
16) condition of and resources available for educational guidance and counselling
17) IT standard of the educational establishment
18) study materials available for educational guidance and counselling and their use and quality
19) the educational establishment as a counselling community
20) the status and function of educational guidance and counselling provision as an aspect of school management and
21) regional cooperation.

c) *Summed variables describing the pupil’s/student’s own development and competence level, called in this evaluation study criterion variables, include*

1) personal growth and development
2) study skills
3) vocational orientation
4) preparedness for further studies and
5) self-directedness.
References


Initiatives Generated by the Results of National Evaluations on Guidance Provision

In Finland careers information, guidance and counselling services are provided mainly by two public service systems: student counselling within the public school system, and the services run by the public labour administration. Schools have the main responsibility for student counselling, with the guidance and counselling services of the employment offices complementing these services.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the organisation of guidance and counselling services in comprehensive and upper secondary schools and in higher education. The regulations concerning the educational environments and system are drawn by the Ministry of Education. The National Board of Education is responsible for the national curriculum guidelines for different school subjects, including instructions for guidance and counselling in comprehensive and upper secondary education. In higher education, polytechnics and universities are themselves responsible for their career services.

The results of the evaluation projects dealing with guidance and counselling services have caused the need for development projects. After the first wide national evaluation project in higher education several development projects have taken place in 2000–2003. The themes of the projects have focused on how to minimize the amount of drop-outs and how to counsel and support the students during their study path so that they finish their studies in planned time. Different methods used in counselling have also been developed in these projects.

After the second evaluation project dealing with guidance and counselling services in basic and upper secondary level education the National Board of Education has concentrated on developing guidance and counselling services in these educational settings. Moreover, the guidance and counselling services delivered in adult education are evaluated in 2003 and there is a plan for development project dealing with adult education as well.
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The aim of the national development project is to develop the guidance and counselling services of different educational settings so that the local plans for producing counselling at schools follow the new national curriculum guidelines. The other goal is to coordinate the different projects conducted in this area so that the good practices born in these projects could be implemented in counselling services delivered by different educational establishments.

During the development projects the need has raised for describing the different dimensions of producing guidance and counselling services. The frames for the following model were developed to create the overall guidance provision within institutional level in Häme Polytechnic (Hakulinen & Kasurinen 2002). The goal of the model has been to have congruence between the strategic planning and the implementation of guidance services. It is focusing both on the practice and policy. The aim has been to illustrate the transparency of services both for decision makers and the various service providers. In this model guidance can be seen as a chain of services and the responsibilities of different providers can be described in different layers. It also provides a platform to generate common concepts for different stakeholders. As a whole, it provides one framework to make the best use of existing resources to meet the demand of guidance services and the needs from different client groups during the different phases of an individual learning programme.

The model has been developed further so that it can be used as a framework in developing guidance and counselling services in different educational settings. The overall guidance provision can be described in seven dimensions:

- **Contextual dimension** - National decision making and policy on guidance and counselling issues, legislation, national curriculum guidelines, etc.
- **Systemic dimension** - Description of the contexts, development of the local and schools' curricula, to what extent individual programmes are possible, how faculties support the individuals, how the teaching is organised etc.
- **Time dimension** - Guidance services during different phases of the individual learning program; pre-entry, entry, on-programme, exit, follow-up.
- **Content dimension** - Marketing, information, guidance by means of different communication channels and methods, and the focus of the counselling practice during different phases of the study path.
Area dimension - Psycho-social support, personal guidance, career guidance, educational guidance.

Responsibility dimension - There must be an institutional plan, which describes the areas of responsibilities for staff members producing guidance and counselling services in different phases of the student's learning programmes.

Methodological dimension - Description of the methods and facilities, which are in use and how these methods are used.

This model allows variations of the service delivery modes. It also helps to illustrate the services which can be seen by the users (the 'front office') and the mechanism which is planning and managing the services (the 'back office'). The model can be completed in more details by the various stakeholders in institutional level. The time before pre-entry phase is also included in the model in educational establishments. Planning and co-operation of the staff before the following study term and student election is included in the model. In each spring the staff should evaluate how they have managed to reach the goals settled for guidance and counselling and after that plan again how guidance and counselling services will be organised in the following year.

The evaluations of counselling and guidance services revealed that the services have not been able to meet the growing need of counselling among students in every educational stage. On institutional level the feedback mechanisms are weak and there is a need for stronger strategic planning and leadership in the guidance delivery.

The ministry of Education and the National Board of Education have already taken concrete steps to promote guidance policies and practice. These steps are concrete evidences of the effectiveness of the evaluation processes. At the end of 2003 the National Board of Education executes the new national guidelines for guidance provision and career education in comprehensive and upper secondary level general education. These guidelines describe the overall goals of guidance and the minimum level of the content of the curricula. Additionally the municipalities are required to provide a strategic and operational plan for the guidance provision and the regular evaluation of services. The new curriculum guidelines for vocational education were executed in 1999. These guidelines follow the same principals as those of general education.
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In addition to the new guidelines the National Board of Education (NBE) has also made the following national initiatives to promote the guidance policies and practices:

1) Development of the overall provision of guidance and counselling services in educational settings. External support for educational institutes in comprehensive and secondary level and adult education. Support for regional projects related to transition phases and cross-sectoral cooperation.

2) Training of school staff and municipal officials for implementation of the new curriculum guidelines.

3) Evaluation of guidance provision. Development of criteria and methodology. National Web-based questionnaire for institutional evaluation is developed in NBE.

4) National programme for in-service training of student counsellors. The goal is to develop professional expertise of practitioners. Development of methodology and materials in Career Management. Student counsellor training units: development of initial training.

5) Training of regional consultants who are working as student counsellors in different educational settings. The regional consultants organise and produce in-service training for teachers in basic guidance skills and essence of guidance services. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education NBE is influencing teacher training units and teacher training programmes to include guidance issues in training of the future teachers. The other group of regional consultants provides in-service training for student counsellors in developing web-based counselling skills. National 3-level in-service training programme for practitioners is developed in NBE.

6) Management skills of the principals, knowledge on guidance. Holistic approach and understanding of guidance goals and services. NBE: the goal is to influence the content of the initial and in-service training of school principals.
7) Guidance services for students with special needs. Training for guidance professionals in skills to meet students with special needs. Skills for cross-sectoral co-operation. Student counsellor training units: counsellor training programmes and in-service training for counsellors.

8) Co-operation with labour market. Integrated and embedded in national curriculum guidelines.

9) Guidance in transition phases. Guidance in transitional phases will be developed by means of cross-sectoral co-operation: NBE, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and Ministry for Social Affairs and Health, and National joint expert group.

On comprehensive and secondary level the National Board of Education will implement next year a web-based service to support the institutional evaluation of guidance. National in-service training and regional pilot projects will also be promoted. One strategic initiative is to embed guidance policy issues in national in-service training programs for principals and school administration personnel.

Within higher education during the next annual contract between the universities and the ministry of education all the universities must be able to provide a concrete plan how they are improving the guidance provision. Additionally, they must have a strategy how they are promoting guidance issues within the development of new study programs. Within polytechnics the Ministry of Education is funding regional projects in developing guidance provision.
Promoting National Guidance Policies

The Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä together with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and the National Board of Education hosted a national seminar entitled: "The future of guidance and counselling in Finland 2002–2012? - A national seminar on policies for Information, Guidance and Counselling". The goal of the seminar was to summarise the results of the national parallel evaluations on guidance provision and promote further discussions on guidance policies in the next national strategy for education and research 2003–2008. The seminar organiser published also a book "Guidance and counselling in Finland 2002". This publication provides background materials for national joint discussions around the results of these national evaluations.

The national guidance policy seminar hosted about 250 delegates, policy leaders, regional authorities, trainers, researchers, stake holders and practitioners. The delegates were representing both the educational sector and public employment services. The role of guidance in preventing social exclusion was emphasised in key note speeches. The importance of long term strategic development to meet the challenges of the recently published evaluation reports was also highlighted.

During the second seminar day there were eight parallel workshops for following themes:

- Why guidance matter for public policy?
- Guidance policies in comprehensive and secondary level education.
- Guidance policies in higher education.
- Guidance policies in adult education.
- Guidance policies in public employment services.
- Policies for multicultural guidance?
- National policies for ICT in guidance.
- Policies for training of career professionals, guidance policies within the training programmes.
The overall focus however, was life long and life wide guidance and counselling. The workshops made concrete initiatives for further development. The most crucial policy statement was the lack of trained practitioners. The participants promoted more coherent national and regional strategies for cross-sectoral co-operation. There is also a strong need to benchmark good practises in institutional guidance provision. There is a need for policies for guidance within transitional stages during life long learning processes. The practitioners need also learning environments for maintaining and developing their professional expertise and promoting regional guidance policies. One concrete proposal was to further develop the current web-based resource centre (http://www.asiantuntijaluotsi.net) from this perspective. The aim of the service is to coordinate national networks in guidance and to support the professional development of their members. Another goal is to strengthen cooperation between different bodies and sectors of government in the field of guidance. The service provides currently tools for sharing policy documents among policy leaders and practitioners. It provides also materials for local policy decisions. The service hosts also mailing lists and discussion groups for national and regional purposes. One of the new features will be a national data base of guidance providers. This will help communication among the practitioners and policy makers.
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References


Appendix 1

The Finnish Educational System

The Finnish educational system is described in Figure A. The children start the pre-school education as 6-years-olds. Compulsory education begins in the autumn of the year a child turns to seven. The comprehensive school lasts nine years. There are not any different educational tracks inside the Finnish comprehensive education but the students study according to nearly similar study programme. In the new distribution of teaching hours for comprehensive education (2002) there are 13 annual week lessons for elective studies during the nine years.

The compulsory education ends at the age 16, but virtually nearly all young people remain in full-time education for a further three years either continuing their general education in the upper secondary general schools (54 %) or entering the vocational education (36 %). Compulsory schools also offer voluntary extra study opportunities, additional 10th form for those who have not managed to get a study place in further education institutions (about 3 % in age group). About 7 % in each age group remains outside the school system after compulsory education.

Upper secondary schools provide general education. Upper secondary education leads to the national matriculation examination. Students in upper secondary education can plan their personal study plan within the limits of course supply and the maximum time allowed for completing studies.

In Finland the vocational system is highly developed and young people can select from over 100 different fields. Student counsellors play a significant role in guiding young people to choose from this wide range of vocational alternatives. Although an apprenticeship system exists, very few young people select that track.

Students of upper secondary general and vocational schools can also include courses from other educational and training institutions in their study programme. Students in vocational schools can select courses offered by upper secondary schools, and students in upper secondary schools can include their study programme vocational schools' courses. This kind of possibility to plan personal study programmes increases the need for counselling services in both educational settings.
Both the students who have chosen the upper secondary general education and those who have studied in vocational education can continue their studies either in universities or polytechnics.

The primary way to apply for admission to upper secondary education institutions, upper secondary schools, vocational schools and folk high schools, and to polytechnics in the higher education sector, is the national joint application system. Most of the students are selected on the basis of their school certificates and grades. Generally, the universities select their students on the basis of the combination of the grades and the results of entrance examinations.
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