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OBJECTIVES AND CONTENTS IN THE FINNISH CAREER GUIDANCE PROFESSIONALS' TRAINING PROGRAMS

ABSTRACT

As part of the national development project on lifelong guidance, coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Development and Administration Centre (KEHA Centre), the Finnish Institute for Educational Research of the University of Jyväskylä has conducted an evaluation of the training programs of career professionals in Finland as presented in the National Strategy for Lifelong Guidance 2020-24.

The evaluation focused on the structure and content of the programs leading to legally defined qualifications of guidance counsellors in education and psychologists, on programs which provide opportunities to work in guidance related activities and on existing in-service training modules.

Based on the analysis of existing curricula, main focus seem to be on competences related to actual work with different client groups with knowledge of guidance theories. More attention needs to be paid on digital competence, identification and acquisition of career management skills as well as evaluation and monitoring the outcomes and impact of guidance processes and programs.

According to the Finnish National Strategy for Lifelong Guidance 2020-2023 (Valtioneuvosto, 2020), Finland has a strongly professionalised system of guidance by international standards, but the professional titles and qualifications of those working in the field vary. The qualifications for guidance counsellors working at comprehensive and secondary level are defined in legislation (Legislation on general and vocational education). The guidance counsellors are required to have qualification for teachers (a master's degree or a special qualification for vocational-school teachers). In addition, all guidance counsellors must have a certificate of the completion of specialist postgraduate diploma in guidance and counselling (60 ECTS). Another option is to take a master's degree programme in guidance and counselling (300 ECTS, which includes the pedagogical training equivalent with 60 ECTS). The qualifications for career psychologists are defined in legislation on employment services.

KEY FINDINGS

The focus on the evaluation was on the structure and content of the training of career professional in Finnish and Swedish languages between 2020-23. The evaluation covered the following three main areas:

- HE programs leading to legally defined qualifications; (guidance counsellors in education & psychologist)
- Programmes in upper secondary level vocational education and universities of applied sciences which provide opportunities to work in settings which include guidance related tasks and activities.
- Overview of existing in-service training modules

The analysis covered the overall structure of the training programs, current volume and intake, participation in the training, retention and placement of graduates. A more detailed analysis was carried out on the content and expected learning outcomes for programs leading to legally defined qualifications.

ANALYSIS OF THE CURRICULA FOR TRAINING PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In Finland, the qualifications for guidance counsellors in comprehensive and secondary level education and psychologists are defined in legislation. The analysis covered the training of guidance counsellors provided by two universities and five universities of applied sciences in Finnish language and one university program in Swedish language. The analysis on the expected learning outcomes for psychologists was based on the competence framework constructed by the universities providing training programs for psychologists.

The analysis focused on expected learning outcomes, content of the training modules as well as practical organisation of the learning tasks described in the curricula. The aim was to identify the expected competencies acquired during the training programs. The programs were analysed to what extent the expected learning outcomes cover the competence descriptors identified in the proposal for national competency framework for career professionals (Vuorinen et al. 2023). This proposed framework consists of three main areas: professionalism, client work, and systemic competency. Together these provide a foundation for the competency of professionals working in different lifelong guidance settings and a tool for competency assessment and development. The descriptions consist of 12 competence areas which are divided into more detailed smaller parts.

KEY FINDINGS

In the training of guidance counsellors, the main focus seems to be in competences related to actual work with client groups with knowledge on guidance theories and methodologies (See figure 1).

The priorities identified in the national lifelong guidance strategy (ethical competence, awareness of languages, culture and gender issues, social justice, prevention of social exclusion and sustainable development) are partly identified in the curricula.

Digital competence, identification and acquisition of career management skills, client groups with special needs were included only in few programs. A common major gap was in evaluation and monitoring the outcomes and impact of both guidance processes and programs.

The expected competences for psychologists cover the most parts of the proposed national competency framework for career professionals but different overall structure. Strong basis in research, working methods and interaction with clients, guidance process and monitoring the outcomes of guidance process are key strengths in the programs. Less focus is on digital competences, systemic competences and links with wider societal goal of guidance, advocacy and community capacity building.

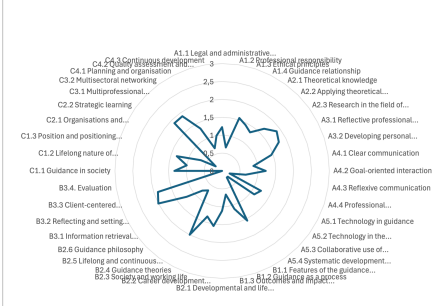


Figure 1. Summary of the levels of expected learning outcomes in the initial training programs for guidance counsellors in Finland 2023.

The validity of the national competency framework as a framework for the analysis of the curricula was tested in an in-service training program of career practitioners in 2023-24. During this pilot altogether 39 career professionals from different settings were asked to fill the competence framework assessment form (Kettunen et al., 2023). The participants were using the tool to identify their current competence and personal learning goals for them during the in-service training. The results align with the findings of the national evaluation of the training programs (See figure 2).

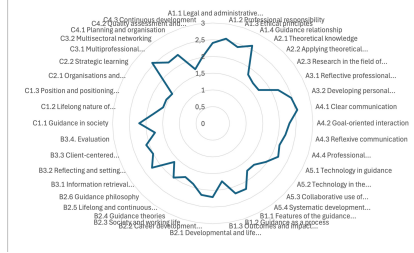


Figure 2. Summary of the self-evaluation of one's own competencies among 39 career practitioners within an in-service training program in 2024.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were presented:

- The learning outcomes of the programs should cover the level 1 in all the competence areas identified in the national framework
- More emphasis is needed on the current gaps on digital competence, evaluation and development of the services, systemic competence and continuous improvement of the services.
- More emphasis is needed on overall competence-based approach in the curricula design,
- The training units should design a more explicit modular structure with more explicit interface with the sections of the national competency framework. This would help co-operation between the training units and provide a basis for a more transparent processes in recognition and validation of prior learning both from student and training unit perspective. In addition, this could lead to more explicit continuum between initial and in-service training of career professionals.
- There should be more emphasis on the lifelong and systemic nature of guidance.

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