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**Quality and professionalism of guidance – a German approach  
to co-ordinated development of standards**

**Abstract**

Lifelong learning requires support through a system of lifelong guidance which should be offered in all sectors of education and career, to citizens of all ages and in all phases of life. Educational and career guidance marked by quality is able to make a crucial contribution to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the educational system and the labour market, to exhaust educational reserves, to promote the individual employability and to meet the future demand for qualified employees as well as to improve the equality of opportunities and social integration. For guidance to be able to fulfil this function, guidance services need to be organized in such a way that they can deliver their services along the lines of assured quality which follows the needs of the user as well as generally accepted professional standards. The prerequisite for this are guidelines and standards for quality and professionalism which are accepted and put into practice by all actors involved in the field. So far, such common guidelines and standards do not yet exist in Germany. The National Guidance Forum *nfb* has committed itself to initiate this process of quality development with all actors involved and to coordinate this project. The presentation describes the project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research to develop and implement guidelines for quality and professionalism in guidance in education, career and employment in Germany, if possible, supported by all relevant actors. The following outcomes are envisaged: Common quality criteria, guidelines and standards for guidance based on a theoretical model and practical experience, a competence framework for practitioners in the different fields of guidance serving as a basis for job profiles and for the design of training and further education for guidance professionals, and a quality development frame (QDF) which includes a set of instruments and tools for the implementation of quality assurance measures together with a pilot test in selected guidance institutions.

**Background of Career Guidance in Germany and quality needs**

Due to the federal structure of Germany's constitution and the division of responsibilities between the Federal Government and the 16 Federal States (Laender) there are different legal responsibilities for guidance provision in Germany. The Laender are responsible for the educational sector (schools and universities), the Federal Government for vocational training and further training as well as for labour market policy.

Since the 1920's vocational guidance and counselling for youth and adults belongs to the legal obligations of the public employment service with its local employment agencies (Bundesagentur fuer Arbeit – BA). The BA has to provide career guidance and counselling to young people for the transition from school to training and work. Guidance and counselling for adults belongs also to the tasks of the BA although in this area additionally multiple providers offer guidance, in particular further training institutions, some municipalities and private career counselling practitioners. With the abolishment of the state monopoly of guidance provision for youth in 1998

also private and semi-private organizations offer such youth career guidance. But no requirements concerning the qualification of staff or any other quality standards regulate the guidance field. The BA however is still the largest and most important provider of career guidance and counselling services in Germany. It provides the career guidance service for about 2 Million students and school leavers ( BA, 2007) and of course for all registered unemployed differentiated also for special target groups.

Guidance and counselling services in the educational sector mainly focuses on career education in school, advice on educational career paths or individual learning difficulties. It is part of the responsibilities of school and higher education institutions. The services varies between the Federal States and the single institutions. Very recently career education, work preparation and initiatives to ease the transition from school to work have been paid much more attention due to the high unemployment risk of school drop outs and students with poor school performance. Universities have increasingly established Career Services in order to facilitate the transition from the academic education to the labour market.

In order to implement and support a lifelong learning strategy in Germany the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium fuer Bildung und Forschung – BMBF) launched a government program in 2001 - 2007, called “Learning Regions Network” (<http://www.lernende-regionen.info>). With funding of the Federal Ministry local and regional networks were established in order to initiate a local lifelong learning and employment strategy including guidance and counselling provision. Training providers, employment agencies, chambers of commerce, enterprises, local schools and municipalities, trade unions and other local actors and stakeholders participated in the networks. Guidance services were in most cases an integral part of these “learning regions networks”. By 2007 at least half of the local networks had succeeded in receiving stable funding from either the municipality or from the Federal State (Land).

Apart from this mainstream guidance provision there are special services for persons with disabilities, for persons with migrant background and in the youth sector for disadvantaged youth who have dropped out of the educational and employment sector (Kompetenzagenturen- competence agencies) but also special guidance services for women entering or reentering the labour market. These services are often carried out by charitable or non-profit organizations, funded by either Federal or Laender Ministries and they are not always well connected to the other guidance services.

A study on the guidance provision in Germany in the field of education, career and employment commissioned by the BMBF confirmed the highly fragmented and heterogeneous guidance system (BMBF 2007). It also stated that the variety of services causes intransparency and often a lack of quality standards and sufficient professionally trained staff. These analyses called for new initiatives and a strategy to develop guidelines and standards for quality in guidance and a quality assurance frame which could be applied to all guidance providers.

## **Role of German National Guidance Forum**

Meanwhile experts, stakeholders and interested institutions and organizations concerned with guidance and counseling created a "National Forum Guidance in Education, Career and Employment" *nfb* (Jenschke, 2007).

The German National Guidance Forum - created as legal association according civil law - is an independent network in which all institutions and organisations, relevant research and training institutions for guidance practitioners, governmental authorities and non-governmental agencies dealing with, offering or financing guidance and counselling as well as organisations of guidance users and consumers can collaborate.

The Forum deals with guidance provided for individuals in education, vocational training and employment sectors. Psychotherapeutic counselling and business consultancy of companies or organisations do not belong to the area of its activity. The Forum understands itself as a platform of all stakeholders and actors in the field of career guidance providing an opportunity for exchange of knowledge and experience across all institutional sectors. The interesting difference in comparison to co-operation mechanisms in other European countries is the bottom-up approach of the German guidance community. Instead of a top-down model which is launched and lead by governmental activities the Forum is a combination of professional expertise and independence and co-operation with governmental authorities through a Board of Trustees (Kuratorium).

Founded in 2006 the Forum currently has 52 members (26 organisations, 25 individual experts and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as supportive member). All member have to be committed to the mission of the association ([www.forum-beratung.de](http://www.forum-beratung.de)).

The general aim of the National Forum is to promote the professional delivery of guidance in education, vocational training and employment sectors in Germany, to stimulate the (further) development of guidance services which meet the different needs of the users, to draft guidelines for quality and quality assurance, and to motivate all partners to accept and recognise them. Based on the EU Council Resolution 2004 (EU, 2004) on guidance and with reference to the results of the various studies of the OECD, EU and the World Bank (2001-2004) the Forum intends to contribute to the professional development of guidance in Germany. The work of the National Forum is based on the definition of guidance of the European Union and takes account of internationally accepted ethical standards (IAEVG 1995) and competences for practitioners (Repetto, 2008) while respecting the specific profiles of services and institutions in the different sectors.

The National Forum promotes all developments and activities integral to good and comprehensive guidance to enhance autonomous initiative, responsibility of the self and the competence of an individual to manage its own education and career; to promote and increase the educational potential of individuals and their abilities to participate in social life and labour market; to maintain and improve the employability of individuals; to support

citizens in using their basic legal rights according the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, especially the right of free development of the individual, of free choice of a career and employment, and to stimulate equal opportunities.

Through its activities the Forum intends to support the responsible authorities in the Federation and the Federal States and in other public bodies in achieving these tasks. However, to guarantee transparency of and easy access to guidance services the Forum considers that better networking and coordination among actors in the different areas of guidance is indispensable. In Germany guidance is in general only offered at points of transition (at the choice of initial training, education and studies, during unemployment and for decisions to further training). But the implementation of a strategy of lifelong learning needs a continuous and coordinated system of high quality guidance services.

As part of the Innovation Committee for Further Education by the Ministry of Education and Research the Forum supported the articulation of targets for the extension and improvement of guidance in Germany. Since 2008 the Forum supports and advises the Ministry of Education and Research concerning its cooperation in the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network ELGPN ([www.elgpn.eu](http://www.elgpn.eu)).

In addition, the Forum will further strive to improve the quality and transparency of guidance in Germany through the encouragement of cross-sector cooperation of all actors and stakeholders in the field of educational, vocational and career guidance. It also will contribute to a strategy of Lifelong Learning in which a coherent system of lifelong guidance is an integral component.

### **The international and European debate on quality development in guidance**

Quality and quality assurance has permanently been on the agenda on the European and International level. The OECD (OECD, 2001 and Plant 2004) initiated with its reviews of guidance services in the member states the international debate on the need for better quality in guidance and the role of good guidance as an individual and public good. The EU Common Reference Tools on guidance "Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems"( CEDEFOP 2005)) stated clearly that the learning, economic and social outcomes of quality guidance can contribute to general policy goals as to increase individual lifelong learning and employability, can lead to higher participation rates and more efficient use of education and training, and enhance labour market efficiency through higher skill levels and reduced unemployment and lower social costs and improve social inclusion, equity and integration into society. In the same publication also reference points for quality assurance systems based on the findings of a CEDEFOP study on quality assurance systems for lifelong guidance provision in Europe (CEDEFOP, 2004) were published and focussed on citizen and user involvement, practitioners competences, service improvement through standards and coherence across systems. The EU 2004 Guidance Resolution (EU, 2004) and the EU 2008 Resolution Integrating lifelong guidance into a strategy of lifelong learning (EU 2008) both pointed out four priorities regarding

guidance improvement. Quality development is one of the priorities besides access, career management skills and co-ordination and co-operation. The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance IAEVG/AIOSP already urged governments to care for quality guidance services in their Paris Declaration 2001 ( van der Broeck, 2002). IAEVG also has launched a world wide survey and finally approved 2003 "International Competencies for Guidance Practitioners" (Repetto, 2008). All these international and European developments influenced very much the debate on the need of professionalism of guidance and quality in Germany.

### **The German quality project through open co-ordination**

The Innovation Committee of the Federal Education Ministry explicitly recommended to develop quality standards for guidance delivery and to support the professionalism of counsellors through a common agreed competence framework for guidance staff (BMBF 2008).

Within the frame of the Innovative Committee Schiersmann et.alii.(2008) from the University of Heidelberg carried out an important study on "Quality and Professionalism in Educational and Vocational Guidance" commissioned by the Federal Education Minister.

Based on the international impulses and the German political aims for better quality of guidance then a series of workshops with professional experts and stakeholders were organised. The National Guidance Forum (National Forum, 2009) took the lead in this development and started the joint project "Process of open coordination for quality development and professionalisation in educational, vocational and career guidance" in October 2009. It was generally agreed to take the Heidelberg study as scientific base for the future quality development process. Therefore, in order to carry out the project, the National Guidance Forum cooperates with the Institute for Education and Research (ibw) of the University of Heidelberg as joint project partner.

The National Guidance Forum *nfb* takes care of the general management and coordination of the project: the cooperation with the advisory council, external communications and publications as well as the organization of workshops in the context of the project. The Institute for Education and Research (ibw) is responsible for the scientific foundation and assistance regarding the work in the working groups for quality development, for the elaboration of tools for quality assurance and for piloting the developed tools and instruments in about 10 selected guidance institutions.

The joint project is supported by government grants from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research for 27 months during the time 2009 –2011. The joint project aims to develop and implement guidelines for quality and professionalism in guidance in education, career and employment in Germany - if possible - supported by all relevant actors. Furthermore, the project will develop and test tools for continuing quality assurance. The working method will be an open co-ordination process. For this purpose active cooperation of the many different stakeholders from the distinct areas of guidance is encouraged and indispensable. The willingness to cooperate in such a process of open coordination has been expressed by many experts

and organisations at two preceding preparatory workshops 2008 and 2009. The German quality development should be based both on a theoretical model and practical experiences of already working guidance services.

### Theoretical frame of the project

If we speak on quality it is important to identify from which perspective quality is expected. Is it the provider, the professional practitioner or is it the politics and society or the client and customer itself. Plant ( 2009) and also Schiersmann (2008) argue that criteria and understanding of quality is depending on the different viewing point and the respective expectations of the viewer for the outcomes of guidance. Consequently if quality should cover all the various aspects representatives of all the regarded groups have to be involved in a quality process. (see graphic 1)

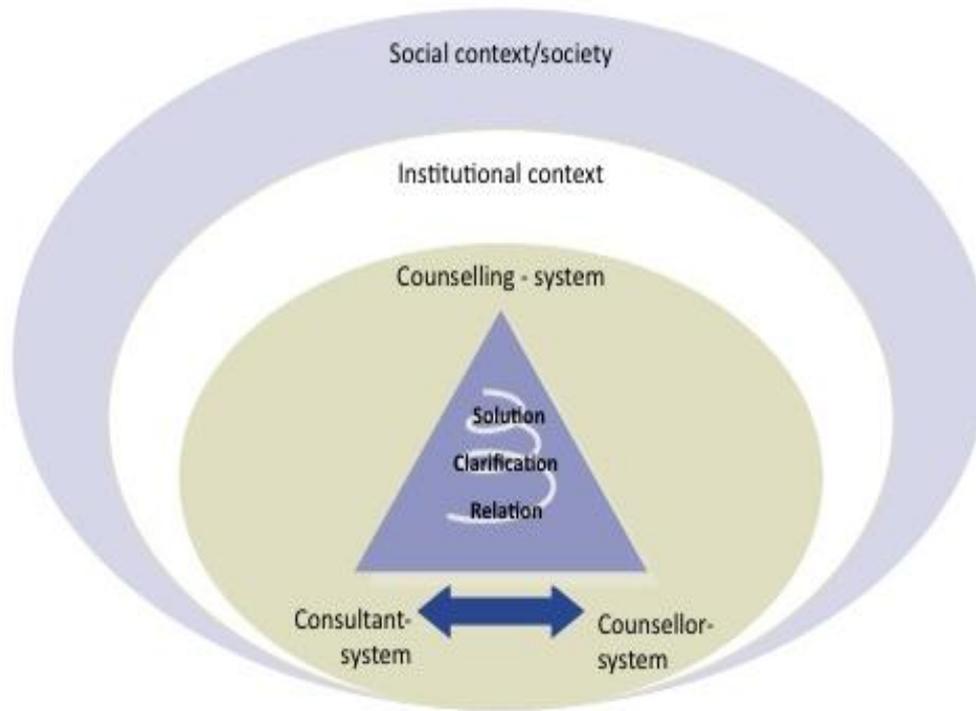
Graphic 1, Schiersmann(2008), p. 27



Also the conception and meaning of guidance is crucial for the process. Schiersman (2009) developed a Systemic Context Model of guidance in which the guidance system contains two interlinked subsystems: the system of counselee and a system of counsellor which are surrounded by the

organisational context of the guidance service and the societal context of legal, social and economic parameters. (see graphic 2)

Graphic 2 Schiersmann (2008), p. 16



In the theoretical approach of the Heidelberg study various national and international catalogues of quality standards were analysed and according to the systemic theoretical guidance model already 18 quality standards identified which are organised in five groups:

1. Basic standards as respect to clients interests and ethical commitment – example of a concrete standard: Guidance organisation and activities are based on users needs.
2. Standards regarding the counselling/guidance process e.g. clarification of goals, relationship to client, focussing on resource – concrete example: Counsellor creates an adequate relationship to the counselee.
3. Counsellor's/Practitioner's professional competences, continuing training and supervision – concrete example: Counsellor is professionally trained according to a professional competence profile.
4. Organisation and organisational processes e.g. mission, service delivery, financing – concrete example: Service act according to a mission and provides adequate resources.
5. Outcomes regarding different social aspects e.g. career competences, education, vocational and occupational opportunities, equity – concrete example: Guidance activity is oriented to self-efficacy and employability of the client and promotes equity.

The discussion of the development of competence profiles for counsellors working in the various guidance settings takes into account the international and European competence studies and is corresponding to the standards. The profiles are also based on the systemic guidance model. Thus, counsellor competences will relate to the guidance process, the relationship between counsellor and counselee, self-reflection of counsellor and counselee, organisation and society and to general comprehensive competences ( as users needs, transparency of process, ethics, quality development). According this Heidelberg approach the working group has to agree on competence profiles which then can be used for training and further training programme development.

### **Expected outcomes of the process**

The stakeholders participate through their collaboration in the planned working groups in which - some parallel, some successive – the following preliminary products should be accomplished:

- A catalogue of common quality criteria, guidelines and standards for guidance in education, career and employment on the basis of a common understanding of guidance.
- A competence framework for practitioners in the different fields of guidance based on the previously defined quality criteria and standards serving as a basis for job profiles and for the design of training and further education programmes for guidance professionals.
- A quality development frame (QDF) which includes a set of instruments and tools for the implementation of quality assurance measures together with a pilot test in selected guidance institutions.
- Strategic recommendations for a sustainable realisation and stabilization of the guidelines for quality and professionalism as well as of quality assurance measures.

### **Cooperation with relevant actors in science and practice**

Representatives of public and private guidance providers (i.e. the Federal Labour Agency, the chambers, the municipalities, the German Association of Adult Education Centres, schools and universities, independent agencies), associations of practitioners (i.e. German Society for Career Guidance, German Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, German Society for Supervision), representatives of guidance sciences, training providers for practitioners are among others involved in the process of open coordination insofar as they are directly collaborate and bring in their professional experience. The cooperation takes place in two parallel working groups:

- Working group 1 develops Standards und Competences
- Working group 2 elaborates a Quality Development Frame (QDF) and tools for the Piloting

## **Realisation and plan of work**

Initially, Working group 1 should reach a consensus about a catalogue of quality standards and criteria on the basis of existing national and international quality catalogues and standards. The agreed standards and criteria also take into account – in the appropriate differentiation - the special characteristics of the different areas and settings of guidance ( schools, universities, employment service, continuing training area etc). Based on these results the next phase of work includes the definition of the requirements for guidance practitioners and the production of one or more competence profiles. Both consider already existing competence profiles or job definitions for counsellors as well as the diverse counsellor training programmes. Here the special characteristics of the different areas and settings of guidance have also to be considered in an appropriate way. The results are also used as input for the work in group 2.

Working Group 2 deals with the definition and establishment of the quality development frame (QDF) how to implement quality assurance that has been worked out in the Heidelberg study mentioned above. In this process the working group 2 also considers the special characteristics of the different areas and settings of guidance as well as already implemented quality management systems. It prepares and assists the testing of the QDF in about 10 counselling institutions and analyses the piloting results.

## **Advisory council as link to policy makers**

The joint project is accompanied by an advisory council of coordination, which is constituted by about 12 representatives from politics, administration, guidance providers and guidance science and practice. The advisory council members stimulate the project work and it is expected that they support the implementation of the outcomes in their respective fields of politics and practice. This council is an important link to policy makers and should guarantee the acceptance of the later outcome of the quality process.

This German approach of quality development is rather challenging as it combines a underlying theory, the experience of practice and also political aims in an integrating open process which involves all relevant partners. Although there might be big barriers of single interests to jump over the National Forum as a co-operation mechanism of the major players in the guidance community tries to achieve better quality for the strongest ally - the user of the services .

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