

# CAREER GUIDANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A how-to guide in setting up and  
providing career guidance services in  
vocational education and training  
schools

## Disclaimer

This report was prepared for the European Training Foundation by Simona Rinaldi, ETF, based on the Guidance and Employment Manual developed by ETF with IECD. The ETF's Florian Kadletz and Cristina Mereuta reviewed the paper and provided written contributions.

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# PREFACE

Effective career guidance helps individuals reach their potential, economies become more efficient, and societies be fairer. It is critical in smooth career transitions for young people as they make choices about education and training relevant to labour market mobility and integration. Students and graduates of vocational education and training (VET) represent a specific category of learners with special needs in terms of the labour market, occupational and technological information, and insights. Nowadays, all workplaces are subject of significant change due to the digital and green transitions, and transformation in technology and trade. VET-related occupations and qualifications are especially exposed to changes in skill requirements. For this reason, scheduling and delivering quality-assured careers guidance and counselling services at VET school level is a major component in strategies to improve school-to-work transitions.

This how-to guide provides concrete advice and tools for schools and other stakeholders so that they can set up career guidance services for young people in vocational schools. In general, careers counselling services should be provided (i) before choosing a specialisation, (ii) during the study or training course and (iii) after graduation to help young people find a job and/or continue in education. The handbook describes the activities and tools associated with providing career guidance services across all three phases of youth career guidance.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) has developed this guidance based on knowledge and experience accumulated during our cooperation with the Lebanese education and employment authorities, including vocational education schools. This joint work focused on setting up of guidance and employment offices within the vocational education system in Lebanon and building staff's capacity to involve themselves in delivering such services.

The document therefore reflects guidance and solutions adapted to rather challenging conditions for careers guidance and counselling services in VET schools and considers the weak economic demand and outlook against which young people transition from school to work. It complements the existing body of guides and tools developed worldwide, while focusing on developing and delivering careers guidance services in fragile socio-economic contexts.

# CONTENTS

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PREFACE	3
CONTENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
<b>CHAPTER 1. CAREER GUIDANCE OFFICERS</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1. Mission and work	8
1.2. Career Guidance Office Layout and Organisation	11
1.3. Work background of Career Guidance Officer	15
1.4. Leading Activities	18
<b>CHAPTER 2. METHODS AND TOOLS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1. Working with students	23
2.2. Parents/Caregivers	25
<b>CHAPTER 3. SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH GUIDANCE WORK</b>	<b>29</b>
3.1. Creating a welcoming environment	29
3.2. Maintaining an engaging environment	30
3.3. Fostering independence	30
3.4. Fostering self-confidence	32
3.5. Supporting students	32
<b>CHAPTER 4: GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1. Identifying labour market needs	34
4.2. Job and internship opportunities and getting students ready	35
<b>FINAL MESSAGE</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>ANNEX 1 – COMPONENTS OF CAREER GUIDANCE WORK IN SCHOOLS</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>ANNEX 2 – INDICATIVE LIST OF STUDENTS’ STRENGTHS AND TALENTS</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>42</b>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This handbook has four chapters describing the institutional set up, the structure for setting up and running careers guidance at school level, the background and experience a careers guidance officer should have, tools and methods for providing counselling services to students and other beneficiaries, such as parents or companies, identifying labour market needs and collaborating with companies and the business sector in general.

The **first chapter** sets out the mission and responsibilities for the body and core staff in charge of careers guidance, namely the careers guidance office and career guidance officers. In the main, a Career Guidance Officer will be responsible for the students' careers guidance before they start their vocational education and training. Then the responsibility shifts to monitoring students' growth both on a personal and professional level. Guidance, however, does not end here as it should go beyond the scope of schooling years through to lifelong guidance.

More specifically, a Career Guidance Officer is responsible for promoting guidance services, mainly through the career fairs and visits to academic schools, as well as informing all students about the services provided by the office. In addition to promoting careers guidance, offices within schools should run basic activities such as mock employment interviews, informing students about job opportunities and helping them to develop and/or enhance their CV including through an integrated life skills approach that empowers young people with a critical understanding of the labour market and its trends and opportunities that also include self-employment and entrepreneurship.

To provide better services to the students, a Career Guidance Officer must know how to introduce themselves to their audience. For this reason, any Career Guidance Officer should possess good presentation skills and the ability to introduce themselves and their mission to the students, parents/caregivers, and potential collaborators in the labour market.

The location of the Career Guidance Officer is also an important factor that needs to be considered when setting up. A place with increased visibility and accessibility for the students is recommended, but you should also take into consideration students' privacy and comfort. In essence, the Career Guidance Office and its staff should provide a welcoming environment for all students.

A guidance office must be set up with some minimum material requirements that are needed for it to operate smoothly. Those materials include computers with access to the internet, desks and chairs for small workshops and meetings, job-related manuals, and books, etc. It is also important to keep in mind accessibility of those resources to students and beneficiaries so that everyone, including teachers and parents, has equal access to the resources provided.

The Career Guidance Officer should also consider how to enhance their own skills to fulfil the office's responsibilities. This includes connecting with local and national networks and companies and staying up to date with the latest technology. As for interpersonal communication skills, it is crucial to communicate effectively to establish and maintain trust-based relationships with students and companies. In addition to the ability to communicate, career guidance officers must know how to handle tough situations that might arise in the workplace and with the students so that difficult situations do not escalate. Career guidance officers should follow guidelines for carrying out activities such as presentations, workshops, and one-to-one sessions. Other tasks are to evaluate the efficiency of careers guidance activities and performance tracking.

The **second chapter** includes ways that help the Career Guidance Officer better evaluate their students and provide some methods to communicate with parents/caregivers to help them with their child's evaluation. The key aspect here is empowering people based on dialogue, (self-)assessment, information, counselling, (self-)learning activities, etc. The Career Guidance Officer can also evaluate and understand their students using frameworks such as the psychologist Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory.

Certain tools can be used to evaluate students and their interests. Careers interviews can be used as a more personal way to gather information about the student, their expectations, interests, and career ambitions. Career interest inventories compare individual interests to those of the general population, identifying higher-than-average areas of interest. Individual interests are then compared with interests of people who have a high degree of job satisfaction in particular occupations to identify potential career paths. Student portfolios/databases include records of the student's achievement, test scores, college entrance scores, aptitude tests or surveys, interest inventories, skills assessments and a statement of the student's personal goals and objectives. Career exploration can be done online. Career guidance officers can follow a specific method for evaluating and guiding students using these tools successively, along with individual counselling sessions.

As for caregivers, the Career Guidance Officer can help provide guidance for them to understand and identify their children's varied strengths. Sometimes these strengths are obvious, like when a child is good at drawing or sport. But some strengths can be harder to recognise, e.g., being a good listener or working well in groups. Recognising and talking about these strengths can help the child thrive. This is especially true for children who are struggling in school.

Career guidance officers need to involve the student's caregivers as they are key people in life. The Officer should explain and help them understand the labour market and the opportunities it holds. They should break down stereotypes like 'higher education is the only option for a safe future', or gender stereotypes like 'trades jobs are not for women'. Also, officers should explain the importance the parent-child relationship has on development. Love, support, trust, and optimism from their family make children feel safe and secure, and are powerful weapons against peer pressure, life's challenges, and disappointments.

The **third chapter** covers key elements of the guidance's objectives and the tasks for career guidance officers. It illustrates the importance of maintaining the well-being of students, in addition to ways to deal with different students, especially those who are facing challenges.

Creating and maintaining a welcoming environment is important to make sure that students always feel comfortable and always come forward for guidance when they need it. This can be ensured by showing an interest in students as well as being sensitive to their needs and emotions. Close cooperation with all subject teachers and school leadership teams in a whole school approach supports students too. Such referral systems are essential and need close cooperation and a dedicated roadmap in school development/work plans.

In addition to comfort, engagement with the activities is equally as important. Repetitive tasks drive a person's interest away over time. This is why maintaining an engaging environment is important, and simple things such as changing small details can help a teacher or a Career Guidance Officer hold a student's attention over time if done at a regular rate.

If a student has personally contributed to a given activity, they are much more likely to remain interested and intrigued to see how things turn out. There are also plenty of ways to achieve learning objectives creatively. Giving students greater academic freedom and flexibility is an easy way to increase their engagement.

Fostering a sense of autonomy and self-confidence is also another important aspect when it comes to guidance. Autonomy helps students in critical thinking and problem-solving because their educational settings encourage these skills to develop. Self-confidence enables students to handle setbacks with ease. It is one of the career guidance officer's responsibilities to nurture these characteristics in students.

Students have varying personality traits, with each trait having its unique features and there are different ways to deal with them. Career guidance officers need to be aware of their students' characteristics and compare them to pre-existing templates to best deal with each archetype. Students also have Career Management Skills (CMS) that differ from individual to individual and it is the career guidance officer's task to help develop these CMS for all.

Lastly, the chapter provides some strategies for identifying and supporting students who are struggling at school.

The **fourth and final chapter** highlights the employment focus of career guidance officers and provides suggestions for establishing and maintaining connections with chambers of commerce, trade bodies and companies in supporting students to seek employment.

It is important to understand the vocational needs of the surrounding labour markets and the technical skills that are needed for the jobs on offer in order to evaluate whether the curriculum at a technical institution aligns with the labour market's needs.

To identify recruitment partners and job opportunities, it is essential to contact the Human Resources department at target institutions that align with the institution's curriculums. Companies choose technical institutions for long-term collaborations, so the school should promote itself and work to build these relationships.

Career guidance officers must have a thorough understanding of the student's technical skills and the available job opportunities to be able to best match a student with a job vacancy. Matching a student with a position correctly promotes the institution's credibility and reputation and establishes a more solid professional relationship with the company.

Career guidance officers are also responsible for helping students with their CVs, cover letters and job interviews while they apply for vacancies.

# CHAPTER 1. CAREER GUIDANCE OFFICERS

## 1.1. Mission and work

The mission of the Career Guidance Officer is to support and facilitate young people's integration to the jobs market in an efficient and transparent manner. The vision of professional integration is as follows:

- It begins with pre-course guidance.
- It is built upon personal and professional monitoring throughout the school year.
- It continues with employment counselling after graduation.

### The scope of the work of the career guidance officer

The main objective of any Career Guidance Officer is to help students map out an appropriate career path. Working with students might be on a one-to-one basis or in small groups while taking into consideration the fact that different students might progress at different rates. Parents/Caregivers should be involved in such activities.

The Career Guidance Officer should consider each student's current circumstances and where they situate themselves in the labour market (where and how the students perceive themselves working in the future) to provide individualised counselling.

Career guidance officers work to ensure that all students within the currently outlined target group have equal access to educational/training and experiential learning opportunities, the kind that will ultimately lead to the desired goal of progressing the student towards appropriate employment and economic independence.

More specific activities include:

- *Activity 1: Promoting Technical Education and Guidance*
  - Provides careers guidance to potential VET learners and parents/caregivers in schools (typically Year 8 and 9 students, depending on the country's education system), online, and at careers fairs, which is based on evidence about the employment status of alumni and other labour market intelligence thereby helping, *inter alia*, to overcome gender stereotypes.
  - Provides all information needed to new students at school registration.
  - Documents and reports on admission decisions and other statistics.
  - Remains aware of any government decisions regarding technical education (legislation, new specialisations, etc.).
  - Maintains an updated list of academic schools in the same area/region.
  - Maintains records for current students and graduates related to their career plans.
  - Builds an alumni network for all graduates.
  - Organises and invites parents/caregivers to workshops, conferences, or meetings on the value of technical education and the industry-related labour market. For example, parents/caregivers should have a kick-off meeting with the Career Guidance Officer and the students at the beginning of the VET course to make a pact for the students to complete the qualification and the parents to do everything necessary to help them achieve this goal.

- *Activity 2: General Guidance*
  - Informs all students, parents/caregivers, subject teachers, and the school leadership team about the services the careers office provides.
  - Educates students (new & enrolled) and parents about:
    - College admissions process
      - Trends in the labour market
      - Specialisations available
      - Career options and opportunities
    - Has career chats and individual follow ups.
    - Assists all students, individually or in groups, with developing academic and professional goals and plans.
    - Incorporates (in close partnership with the subject teachers) life skills sessions into the school timetable (curricular and extra-curricular).
    - Monitors student academic performance and behaviour and stages appropriate interventions in close coordination with the teachers and leadership team.
    - Implements an effective referral and follow-up process as needed.
- *Activity 3: Career Guidance and Employment Counselling*
  - Performs mock employment interviews with all graduating students to prepare them for the labour market.
  - Provides advice and training for students and teachers on CV's writing, cover letters, applications, job hunting and interview techniques.
  - Runs careers fairs for students during careers week.
  - Organises field visits to potential employers in collaboration with teachers.
  - Informs the students of the various kinds of job opportunities and ways of building a career.

**Annex 1 includes a non-exhaustive list of various aspects of careers guidance activity in schools.**

**Remember!**

- A Career Guidance Office is not a placement office.
- A Career Guidance Office is not a research or statistics agency.

## **Introducing and promoting Career Guidance Officers**

Before a Career Guidance Officer can start work, the first thing to do is to start increasing visibility and awareness among the students, subject teachers, school leadership team and wider school community from parents/caregivers to local companies, etc. Introducing oneself to students or companies helps them understand who you are and what they can expect from you. How you present yourself in that first meeting will make an impression that will have a lasting impact on the target audience. However, schools are not supposed to and cannot perform all careers guidance activities by

themselves; education ministries should ideally set up partnerships at a national level with chambers of commerce, trade organisations and public employment services to support the work done in school. By only involving local companies close to the school when identifying a demand for labour, you may only be providing a very limited insight into the world of work and job opportunities.

### **Tips for introducing yourself professionally:**

- Go beyond the professional title. Offer a clear and audience-appropriate job description of the Career Guidance Officer role.
- Provide information relevant to the context. Giving personal anecdotes or irrelevant examples will detract from the important information, so be mindful of the situation you are in.
- Emphasise your contributions. Your introduction to the target audience should help them understand how you will contribute to their work lives and what challenges you will help them overcome.
- Be aware of the cultural context, gender stereotypes and religious diversity. Make sure that you do not offend anyone.
- Example of an introduction to a learner close to graduation:

‘My name is X, and I’m a Career Guidance Officer in Y technical school. My job is to provide job seekers with expert advice on career-related topics. I read a lot and consult with recruiting professionals, so you don’t have to. I’ll show you how to hack the recruitment process, create a job-winning resume, introduce yourself professionally and ace that job interview, along with so much more.’

This information will come in handy when you want to introduce yourself and the careers service you provide for the students, teachers, school leadership team and parents/caregivers, which should be done through multiple means: classroom presentations, testimonial videos from recipients of guidance (current and former students) and live talks from peers and alumni to highlight the added value this work brings for clients. Peer-to-peer exchange is especially powerful for this age group. These introductions will make everyone aware of the Career Guidance Office, what it offers and its resources.

Suggested topics to cover include general, subject-specific and values explorations (see below). Career Guidance Officers also need to be open to developing new topics as the need arises.

#### **General presentation**

First introductions should be general in nature. After coordinating with the teachers, the Career Guidance Officer needs to go around classrooms. It is important that this presentation describes the purpose, location, services, appointment hours and resources the Career Guidance Office has. The recommended general presentation consists of a sample introductory video, a descriptive brochure, and some printouts on specific information (social media pages, events, etc.) as well as the peer-to-peer videos/activities listed above. Each year, the incoming year group needs to attend the general presentation to become aware of the available resources.

#### **Subject-specific presentation**

Subject-specific presentations come in response to individual teacher needs. For example, a Business Law class presentation might include information on the nature of legal work and related legal occupations. The Career Guidance Officer then prepares information on the training, working conditions, earnings and expected job prospects for the requested area or career. Presentations should include all levels in any career area. However, presentations are the minima that are expected. Experiential learning activities really make learners experience much better what a profession is like and help them create a vision of themselves in the future in this occupation, which in turn supports

them in their decision-making. Such activities include job shadowing, company visits, mock company work within the school, work-based learning within the school, career talks with representatives or videos showing what work life are like. High-tech solutions to this end also include e.g., Virtual Reality to explore a workspace and occupation.

### **Values exploration presentation**

Values exploration presentations take the form of a self-assessment of the student's work values. Students are guided to conduct a self-assessment of their values to learn more about themselves and how their values relate to their desired world of work. Value presentations cover the qualities that employers generally look for but that students rarely see as important attributes, such as adaptability, creative thinking, teamwork skills, creativity, ethics and so on.

## **1.2. Career Guidance Office Layout and Organisation**

### **General considerations when setting up the office**

- Where is the best location?
- Who will be using the office?
- How many people need to be accommodated at one time?
- What types of services and courses will be on offer?
- How much space is needed for these services and any related equipment?
- What resources will be available for students, faculty and staff, or parents who need information to guide their children?

#### **Location**

The optimal location for a Careers Guidance Office to be set up is between classrooms or near the schoolyard. Most importantly, it should be separate from the school leadership team's offices. This will ensure easy access to students and ensure the office is visible and well-integrated in the school. For instance, a classroom/room where there is generally high traffic of students might be chosen to accommodate the Career Guidance Officer.

#### **Considerations to take into account:**

- Ease of access for students, especially those with physical disabilities
- Space to accommodate small workshops as well as private/individual workstations
- Space to ensure privacy in officer-student interactions and conversations
- The ability to have one-on-one conversations behind closed doors
- The ability to restrict vision into the area to ensure privacy, such as having blinds on the windows
- Quiet areas for assessments

#### **Set up (design, structure and hospitality)**

The way the office is set up depends on what image you are trying to convey. Whatever this image may be, the sensorial cues that visitors initially encounter will influence their first impression. It is

important to note that establishing a great first impression will help students develop a more positive perception towards the service.

**Design:** this includes furniture, layout, colours and décor. Focus on creating harmony.

**Seating:** visitors to the office should always be offered a place where they can sit/wait comfortably as this shows thoughtfulness. A good way to create a seating plan for the office is to estimate the predicted traffic, in turn ensuring a place for all possible visitors to sit. You can base this number on the student population found within the school and the estimated appointments/drop-ins per day.

- For one-on-one interactions with the officer, there should ideally be two chairs (one for the student and one for any parent joining the meeting) placed in front of and in close proximity to the officer's desk.
- For small workshops, an optional round table can be set up in the office with ideally no more than six chairs around it.
- Larger workshops can be done in other classes outside of the Career Guidance Officer to accommodate a larger number of students and ensure their comfort.

**Signage:** There should be a clearly visible and written signpost at the entrance/door of the office. Students/visitors need to know that they are in the correct place. If people do not know whether they are in the right place or not, this can cause hesitation/awkwardness and possibly drive people away from your service. Additionally, promotional activities such as class presentations will draw attention to the location of the Career Guidance Office, as will posters/brochures hung up around school and distributed to the students and parents. Following the logic of a whole school approach, subject teachers should actively refer learners to the Career Guidance Officer, which is why the officer needs to have annual updates on teachers' activities and get them on board with the benefits for learners' academic performance, life skills and career readiness and/or employability.

**Accessibility:** by making the office accessible to people with disabilities, you send a message that your service is a welcoming environment to all. Conditions to keep in mind are:

- People with mobility issues/disabilities
- People with visual or hearing impairments
- People with cognitive conditions (dyslexia, for example)

**Cleanliness:** keep the space organised and tidy to remain an inviting place that is use-friendly.

## **Materials**

- Essential requirements:
  - a. Access to a computer with an internet connection linking to, *inter alia*, to self-learning activities and career exploration materials
  - b. Printer/copy machine
  - c. Occupational and training information
  - d. College/university brochures
  - e. Assessments (Holland test, etc.)
  - f. Test preparation materials (university entrance exams, etc.)
  - g. Job-seeking materials (interview guidelines, how to write a cover letter, CV templates, etc.)
- Possible extra additions:
  - a. TV monitor
  - b. Projector for workshops
  - c. Additional job-seeking materials (reference books, journals, occupational files, etc.)

## **Ease of access and resource availability**

An important aspect of any guidance and employment office is how resource materials are presented. The resources need to be organised in a manner that invites and encourages people to use them without feeling as though they are imposing on the staff. All resources need to be labelled and organised for easy access. Many students and instructors will stop by the Career Guidance Office to browse through the books, college brochures and publications. How you place resources will differ according to the amount of space available, be it an office, a large room, or over several rooms. It is important to always keep the available resources current, updating them whenever possible and on a regular basis.

The optimum arrangement for resource materials will provide sufficient space to display the resources in four major divisions:

### **1. Career search section**

The resources in this section should provide job descriptions, future outlooks for careers, average national salaries, training or college requirements, academic pre-requirements, related jobs, working conditions and other pertinent job description information. Books on vocational guidance, occupational exploration and specific careers are very popular.

### **2. Job hunt section**

This section consists of books, magazines and publications on CV, application procedures, interviewing techniques, cover letters, finding employment, the job market, job skills and other related materials. Many high school students are in the school-to-work transition phase, and this section provides the careers guidance tools to serve these students.

### **3. Technical school and college section**

The technical vocational school and college section is very important. It is used extensively by students and by parents! Include books that discuss selecting and applying to a higher education institution, financial aid information, campus visits, and guides for parents and students.

### **4. Bulletin board**

5. A bulletin board is useful for posting recent articles, job announcements from local employers, deadlines for career guidance office activities and information on upcoming events such as careers fairs or forums.

6. Teachers' section Teachers represent a core partner at a school level to help reach all students and identify those most in need for support, e.g., students with declining academic performance and/or decreasing interest in learning. The section should provide practical information for teachers on how to best collaborate with students, but also provide some basic learning materials to increase their understanding of career guidance.

### **7. Role model, alumni, and peer-learning section**

Here students can get access to testimonials from peers and learn about how they have achieved a successful transition to the world of work or understand challenges they faced and how they learned from them. It should also provide testimonials from role models, e.g., women entrepreneurs, women in tech or local sports heroes talking about their careers. Ideally, learners will also be able to get contacts of alumni or even volunteer coaches from industry here, providing young people with insights into successful careers in each sector. Linking students to coaches could come via other organisations such as chambers of commerce and trade organisations who have an interest in attracting new talent and therefore in investing in guidance initiatives.

## **Research and information monitoring**

In order to create the resource library for the Career Guidance Office and to stay up to date with information and publications, officers must research and identify different sources of information. As mentioned above, all resources need to be updated on a regular basis. Therefore, Career Guidance

Officers will ideally update links to existing national platforms regularly, e.g., public employment service and education information platforms. The following are key resources that Career Guidance Officers rely on.

## **1. National documents**

National authorities frequently publish legislation updates and other official decisions. Official lists of occupations, related VET courses, specialisations, registration conditions and requirements must always be available within any Career Guidance office to help students effectively, answer all their questions and meet their needs successfully. Also very important is skills intelligence at a national and, ideally, a local level, translated into a language spoken by the target groups: school leadership teams, teachers, parents/caregivers and learners. This should be accompanied by information on tracking graduates. This will provide the evidence base to move from marketing VET and the schools towards supporting informed decision making.

## **2. Training information**

Books and online resources related to specific training opportunities can be ordered through companies or from career resource catalogues. Having several books in each category from different publishers will ensure complete information is available to students.

## **3. Career decision-making materials**

Career decision-making materials include both test materials and individualised, self-guided, career-planning books. There are many books available, and we advise you select three or four to allow for individual preferences. There are also many excellent guides to working with people in career development and career transition. Career Guidance Officers can use these career-planning books for individual or group workshops and classroom presentations. Moreover, career education classes offered as curricular or extra-curricular activities throughout the courses build on the main support structure to develop career management skills further. Those classes will reach all learners in the best case (as a curriculum component) scenario, while those in need of more support might use extracurricular support in the Career Guidance Office.

## **4. Test preparation materials**

Students may be interested in study guides for tests they might take in conjunction with their future plans. Test preparation materials are highly recommended for a careers resource area. The books will give an overview of test content, time allotted, testing procedures and exam technique. Sample test questions and review exercises are included in the study guides. Offering several study guide versions for the same test will provide students with a choice of materials.

## **5. College/University brochures**

Brochures from several universities and colleges are a vital resource for students considering a university track. These brochures contain the admission policies, tuition rates, addresses, courses of study, and other pertinent information on individual schools. You can obtain brochures directly from the institution. Another point of access is to look for the institution web page.

## **6. Job Opportunities/Vacancies/Work experience opportunities**

Developing connections with companies help officers get advanced notice of current job vacancies, internship opportunities, job shadowing offers, opportunities to engage in career talks, etc. that they can share with their students. In addition to direct contacts, most organisations and employers post their job vacancies on the internet. Some useful websites to check would be company websites, LinkedIn, etc. It is also highly advisable to connect with chambers of commerce and trade organisations for the same purpose. You might also think about joint activities with other VET schools and employer organisations. Another key partner is trade unions, as they usually have rich experience about work life and work conditions and are an important partner in creating a real understanding of the labour market and job opportunities.

## 1.3. Work background of Career Guidance Officer

Knowing oneself and working on personal attributes helps the Career Guidance Officer become a better version of themselves. This personal development includes knowing and adapting to the current environment that the officer is placed in, as well as working on personal and communication skills.

### Qualifications and skills for a Career Guidance Officer

Individual countries may have set in place particular qualifications for career guidance practitioners or standards for the skills they need (e.g., Canada, Serbia, Germany), while others might have dedicated short-term training courses or simply define the occupational requirements at a local level. In any case, it is important to clearly define the knowledge, skills and attitudes those taking up the role need to have. Preferably, it would be a full-time position and not something done on the side, alongside teaching for instance. To serve as a Career Guidance Officer, the following are required characteristics:

#### Knowledge

##### Knowledge of the labour market

Career Guidance Officers need to have a solid understanding of the labour market including trends. Knowledge of the local labour market in the school community is important as well as results from tracker studies. Not all countries have solid labour market intelligence available or translated into the language of client groups; however, qualitative information from local or national focus group meetings at local can provide important input. One area of particular importance is the informal economy, as it is a reality in many countries; to this end, careers guidance practitioners should also be knowledgeable about the informal sector including risks and opportunities.

##### Knowledge of gender stereotypes

This is important in the work with learners, but also with parents/caregivers. Role models can also help shed light on different realities.

##### Knowledge of career development theories and careers guidance tools and methodologies

Career Guidance Officers need to know the diverse theories and approaches to be able to apply the ones that best fit the needs of their 'clients'. In that respect, it is also important to go beyond personality traits and interest testing and have knowledge to design a career education learning program that supports the development of career management skills (CMS). CMS are different from traits, as they emphasise that individuals can actually learn and have the power to shape their own life.

##### Understanding the work environment

To be able to provide a better service for the students and to be able to fully understand the local dynamics of their work, Career Guidance Officers need to familiarise themselves with the national laws and legislation when it comes to vocational/technical education. This will help them provide a better frame of reference for the students and allow officers to answer any question the student might ask about their education and what options it opens up.

In addition to this, meeting with the school board/directors is key to get their buy-in and to better understand the rules and regulations of that specific institution. Meeting with teachers is as well essential to build cooperation and understand the system of education that they follow (this includes discussing their curriculums and educational goals).

## Transversal skills

### Interpersonal abilities

- **Compassion:** officers will usually deal with students who are going through difficult and stressful situations, especially when it comes to choosing their career path. For this reason, officers must be compassionate and be able to empathise with the students.
- **Interpersonal skills:** officers work in direct contact with students, organisations, parents and teachers, requiring varied methods of communication and collaboration. Interpersonal skills are thus needed to establish and maintain a healthy and good working relationship with everyone.
- **Listening skills:** being able to grant your full attention to the student is an essential quality for officers to better understand their problems.
- **Speaking skills:** communication is always key, and an officer should be able to deliver information in a way that is easy for the student to understand.
- **Self-regulation competence:** in order to be able to help others develop interpersonal skills and deal with challenging situations at work, officers need to show awareness and be themselves able to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviour. Part of this is also to be able to care for their own physical and mental wellbeing so that they can help others take care of themselves.
- **Learning-to-learn competence:** labour markets and education and training systems change rapidly, as do approaches to career guidance. Officers therefore need to show the capacity to plan, organise, monitor and review their own learning. This also includes the belief in their own and others' potential to continuously learn and progress.
- **Critical thinking competence:** In order to support critical thinking in learners, officers need to be themselves able to assess information, data and arguments to support reasoned conclusions and decision-making.

### Networking skills

We also recommend officers go beyond the bounds of the school itself. It is unlikely that any one Career Guidance Officer can establish the perfect report on what opportunities are currently available and keep it up to date constantly. This is why coordination with other career guidance officers from different schools is highly recommended. For instance, if one Career Guidance Officer finds a particular workshop helpful, they can share resources with other career guidance officers. Equally, if one Career Guidance Officer receives an alert or finds a job vacancy that no students are suited for or interested in, they can share this availability/vacancy with other career guidance officers who might have interested students. In addition, scanning for information on local companies that are known to be hiring can give career guidance officers a better idea about what expertise is currently in demand locally. Another key network to connect to are chambers of commerce and trade organisations as well as trade unions. These help officers to find partners beyond the local stakeholders. Ideally, education ministries should facilitate such partnerships.

### Communication skills

Career Guidance Officers are required to have excellent interpersonal skills in order to work with students, colleagues, parents and the community. People with better interpersonal skills tend to establish good relationships with others. Making the person you are speaking to feel that you are actively listening is essential for a constructive conversation and establishing good communication with the person across from you.

## Tips on how to improve your communication skills

- Remember that a conversation is a two-way street, or an exchange of ideas between two individuals, so being open to feedback is important.
- Do not talk over the other person. This indirectly tells the person that you do not value what they are saying, and it shows a lack of listening skills. Conversely, if you are constantly being talked over, try to deliver your point of view in a more concise manner because this might be an indicator that you are long-winded.
- Try not to finish other people's sentences. You may think that you are showing them that you understand what they are saying, but in reality, this might be an indicator that you do not regard what they are saying as important.
- Paraphrasing what the other person just told you back to them not only shows that you understood what they were saying, but also that you were indeed actively listening to them.
- Keep your focus on the conversation at hand and be an active listener by nodding or answering the other person's questions.
- Maintaining eye contact is a non-verbal sign of a good listener, and by doing so you avoid any external distraction unrelated to the current conversation. Looking away occasionally is okay, because staring intently at the person could be uncomfortable for them.
- Be aware of body language. Even if you do not pronounce a single word, your body language can speak for itself. Avoid crossing your arms as it sends a message that you are not open to the other person's idea. Hands on the hips may make it seem like you are being defensive. Be aware of what you are physically doing while listening.
- Avoid using unnecessary conversation fillers (such as 'uhm') as they distract the listener from the message that you want to deliver. Try thinking about what you want to say beforehand.
- Be respectful of other people's opinions. In a disagreement, try not to respond in a confrontational manner.
- Most importantly, practice! Keeping the tips mentioned above in mind, try to participate in conversations during networking events and pay attention to how well others are communicating and how you are as well.

## Public speaking

The fear of public speaking, also known as stage fright, is one of the most reported fears by adults. Stage fright has a huge impact on a person's self-confidence and self-esteem and often causes some people to miss out on opportunities or even fail at their jobs. Below are some tips to help people better cope with this situation:

- Try to shift your focus from yourself and your fear to what you are contributing: something of true value to your audience.
- Do not scare yourself with thoughts of what might go wrong, instead try thinking of reassuring ideas.
- Refuse to allow yourself to think of thoughts that suggest self-doubt and create a sense of low confidence.
- Deep breathing and relaxation exercises help calm your body and mind.
- Visualise your success. Try to focus on the strengths that you know you have.
- Prepare the presentation material in advance, then read it aloud to hear your voice.

- Try to make connections with the audience by making small talk or smiling and greeting people.
- Keep yourself in a confident posture. Be open and make eye contact.
- Know that no one is perfect and that everyone makes mistakes. Try to act natural and be yourself.

### Dealing with difficult situations

Difficult situations are sure to arise when dealing with students and working on their progress. It is important to not allow any uncomfortable situation to get out of hand or escalate into something bigger. Below are some directions to follow when dealing with difficult situations:

- Use conflict as an opportunity. It is normal for people to have different perspectives, and it is natural to disagree with others from time to time. Any disagreement can be used as a resource to improve communication and better understand the other person, and it can help build cooperation and trust. Avoiding conflict can inflict more damage than facing it head on and dealing with it appropriately.
- Do not react immediately. Take some time to think logically and gather your emotions. Give yourself enough room to remain focused and identify the main needs and interests in the current situation.
- Attack the problem, not people. Keep an objective eye on the problem and, while it is hard to do, try to detach yourself from those feelings that you have for certain people. Try to understand what the actual problem is and generate ideas on settling it. Do not attack the other person and try to see the situation from their point of view. If you make assumptions about their behaviour, verify by asking them or repeat what you thought you heard. Show respect, try not to interrupt, and avoid using hostile words that provoke reactions.
- Practise direct communication. Speak directly to the other party. Use 'I' statements and be clear about points of agreement, purpose and needs. Use body language to show support and attention. Ask problem-solving questions. Other people can provide you with some very important information about yourself, both positive and negative, and you can provide equally important information helpful to them.
- Look past positions to underlying interests. A position is someone's limited view of what solution is necessary to meet a particular need. Until the needs and interests of each of you are ascertained, it is not possible to generate options that will be mutually beneficial and agreeable. Try to identify the other person's physical or psychological needs along with your common interests.

### Digital skills

Careers Guidance Officers need to possess and regularly update their digital skills to use information and communication technology for careers guidance, for example using chat rooms to set up exchanges between employers' representatives or unions and learners or using social media. It is important that career guidance officers are always up to date with all the relevant developments in the labour market, especially in digitalisation since young students will be attracted to newer technologies and job opportunities arising from them.

## 1.4. Leading Activities

Career Guidance Officers are responsible for designing and implementing various activities, such as career education programs, information sessions, workshops, or individual sessions.

Below are suggestions to effectively lead different types of activities.

## General Tips

- Plan the activity in the calendar.
- Prepare in advance by doing your research and gathering the materials needed.
- Consider how to make the content engaging and informative.

## Design and implementation of career education programs

In many countries, such programs are designed centrally together with working materials and teaching support. Typically, structured curricular or extra-curricular learning activities aim at developing individuals' career management skills and building the capacity to identify and interpret labour market intelligence, learning and career opportunities. Often, careers education follows a programmed and gradual approach to skills development, reflecting a curriculum and relying on a mix of classroom activities, networking with professionals and experiential/work experience or community service opportunities.

In other cases, programs are developed at a local level; in this event, close cooperation with subject teachers is crucial. Careers education has huge leverage because it can reach whole generations and lead to developing transversal key skills over the whole period in VET education. These are skills that cannot be developed in one-off information sessions. There are many good practice examples you can learn from, and some examples are available in countries such as Malta, Ireland, Armenia, etc.

### ***Group information sessions***

- Presenting information
  - Keep your formal presentation time short to allow for interaction with the audience either through questions or networking.
  - If using a visual aid, try to make your slides concise with simple, necessary text.
  - Bring hard copy brochures and materials to hand out, if available.
- Testimonials
  - Invite senior staff from companies and recent graduates to offer testimonials. Students respond well to listening to the experiences of individuals, e.g., employees providing info and details of their career path since graduation.
  - Senior staff can demonstrate paths of progression within an organisation.
  - Recent graduates can provide advice to students on how to navigate the current market and usually relate better to the students.
- Application support
  - Students respond well to presentations that help with their career development or the job application process.
  - Explain the recruitment process, for example, an online application or assessment centre and interview.
  - Explain what a student can do to stand out from the competition – perhaps hints on addressing selection criteria or sample interview questions.

### ***Individual sessions***

Focus on the student. Let the student do most of the talking while you remain focused and interactive. Ask the student how they would go about dealing with a certain situation before you give your input.

- Inform the student that they should come prepared for the meeting just as you will.
- Celebrate successes. Make sure you congratulate the student for any success that they have and let them know that you admire their achievement no matter how small it may seem.
- Specify desired results. Help the student identify the current objectives that you are working on and help them set a goal for the desired results. Be specific and clear on what the end results should be.
- Ask good questions. Your students will know you are engaged and listening when you ask appropriate, challenging questions. Do not interrogate. Your questions should help you understand the situation and give you the chance to acknowledge great decisions, actions, or results or help them identify where they may need to do more planning.
- Share information. Once the student has given you updates, share any relevant or new information with them.
- Ask how you can help. Part of being a good Career Guidance Officer is asking the student how you can be a support to them. Do not assume what they would like to have you do; ask them how they need you to be involved.

### ***Workshops***

A workshop is a single, short educational session designed to teach or introduce participants to practical skills, techniques, or ideas that they can then use in their work or their daily lives. A workshop engages the students in active learning and should be more interactive than an information session.

To conduct a workshop:

- Consider your topic. The first element of planning a workshop is to know what you are talking about. No matter how interactive and participation-led your workshop will be, you still need to have a good command of what you are presenting. Do your research so that you are confident you can deal with most questions and issues that might come up. That does not mean you have to know absolutely everything about the topic, but that you have to know a reasonable amount and understand it well enough so that you can help students fit it into the context of their own jobs and lives.
- Consider your audience. Your audience, the people who will actually be at the workshop (typically students), are probably the most important piece of the puzzle here. Understanding them and their needs will do more than anything else to help you decide what to do and how to do it.
  - What do they already know? If you expect most of the students to be familiar with the topic, that will greatly affect how and to what extent you choose to present material.
  - Will they come in with a particular attitude toward the workshop? They will if you are offering material that flies in the face of what they think they know is true. Are you introducing a new concept or method that conflicts with what they have already been doing or with their previous training? If so, the first thing you have to address may be their lack of sympathy or uncertainty. On the other hand, they might also be biased in your favour if you are offering what seems to be a solution to a difficult problem.
  - Under what circumstances are they attending this workshop? Did they choose it from among several possibilities (as at a conference)? Did they request it? Is it a requirement? Is it to learn something they absolutely need to know? Each of these reasons implies a different attitude, a different level of interest and commitment and a different approach on the part of the presenter.

- Consider the workshop size. If the group is an ideal size (about 8-12) you can arrange activities that involve participants as individuals, as small groups (two to four) and as the whole group. If the group is larger than 12, you will probably want to split it up for many activities. If it is smaller than eight, you might be better off having the whole group work together for most of the workshop.
- Vary activities. Students can get bored or overwhelmed. Two or three consecutive hours of one person talking will send many people out the door screaming for fresh air. Breaking up the time by involving participants in several different kinds of activities is far more conducive to their learning than asking them to sit still and do one thing for the whole time.
- Vary the seriousness of the material. Interspersing activities and ideas that are fun or humorous with others that are more serious can not only keep participants awake but can aid in learning as well.
- Plan a break. This will address to the attention-span issue and allow students a chance to go to the bathroom, etc. without disturbing the flow of the workshop.
- Participants need time to talk and connect with one another. The opportunity to get to know others and to exchange ideas is one of the main values of a workshop for many people and should not be neglected.

### Activity evaluations

Career guidance officers should monitor their efforts and performance. For any activity that is to be done under the umbrella term of careers guidance, it is important to consider whether the activities meet key indicators of good services. Some of those indicators include:

- Relevance:

Considered a service with diverse aspects and beneficiaries, careers guidance is a broad field. It is important to ensure that the chosen careers guidance practices are appropriate for the target group of vocational schools.

- Innovation:

It is important to use innovative practices of guidance instead of only conventional ones. Practices should be interest-oriented and user-centred. In that sense, activities should contain distinctive and novel features that add significant value to what is already present in conventional ones.

- Empowerment:

One of the main focuses of careers guidance is promoting young people's autonomy by developing their career management skills. With that in mind, the activities on offer should aim towards achieving that goal by having students actively involved in implementing the activity. Many countries have developed career management skills frameworks that set out the knowledge, skills and attitudes the learners should develop as a result (outcomes) of careers guidance and in particular career education programs. Such frameworks are useful for designing learning and guidance activities as well as for monitoring and evaluating guidance activities.

- Effectiveness:

All activities should be planned and implemented taking into consideration the desired outcome and expected results. To ensure effectiveness, activities should yield clear results that fulfil the initial criteria and objectives.

- Transferability:

With conditions changing rapidly over a short period of time (consider the sudden onset of the COVID-19 situation, instability in the country, economic crises, labour market freezes, etc.), it is important that a particular activity is easily transferable and can be delivered in different conditions/contexts.

- Accessibility:

Activities should increase the proximity and familiarity of the subject topic to the students.

- Equality:

Activities should not be biased in terms of the socioeconomic levels of students or their gender. Equal opportunities should be promoted.

- Sustainability:

It is important to ensure that the skills a student will acquire from a certain activity can be used at and be useful to relevant organisations or stakeholders.

### Tracking performance

When establishing a career guidance office, it is helpful to prepare a regular progress report (e.g. on a monthly or quarterly basis). A monthly report is a good tracking or assessment instrument. This documentation will prove the use and value of the career guidance office. Submit copies to those involved with the supervision and funding of the office. The report is necessary for two reasons:

- First, it gives any sponsors monthly accomplishments.
- Second, it enables the Career Guidance Officer to analyse the process and to make any changes necessary. Information in the report is used to evaluate efforts and to continually improve resources and processes.

The report needs to contain information on all phases of setting up and operating the career guidance office. The report should include documentation on ordering equipment, resources and supplies, the actual moving into the office, training procedures, seminars and meetings attended, open days, any forms, brochures, or literature developed and general day-to-day operations. In addition to input-oriented data, information on the amount of individual, group sessions and parent/caretaker meetings that took place, as well as involvement of teachers, school management, employers, unions etc. are essential. A 'lessons learned' section on how to improve processes, services and networks should also be included.

The tally of student data is also to be included: the number of students, number of disabled students, grades, and gender. This basic information should be kept on a simple sign-in sheet rather than a comprehensive intake form.

In addition to the objective analysis of the month, a subjective evaluation should also be conducted. The Career Guidance Officer can review the month's activities and discuss any problems that they may have encountered with those concerned alongside solutions to be implemented for the future.

### Attitudes and ethical behaviour

Refer to ethical codes of conduct and give examples.

Career Guidance Officers should adhere to ethical guidelines that lay the foundation for (1) taking into account the holistic needs of clients (educational, vocational, personal and social), (2) respecting the dignity of each person receiving educational and vocational guidance, and (3) avoiding unnecessarily imposing their personal values and striving to take into account the world views of their clients to avoid discrimination.

However, ethical guidelines are holistic and go beyond the mere relationship between counsellor and client. Good examples are:

- IAEVG Ethical Guidelines: <https://iaevg.com/Ethical-guidelines>
- The Canadian Career Development Foundation's Code of Ethics for Career Development Professionals: [https://ccdp-pcdc.ca/en/pdf/Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_2021\\_EN.pdf](https://ccdp-pcdc.ca/en/pdf/Code_of_Ethics_2021_EN.pdf)
- The UK Career Development Institute's code of ethics: CDI Code of Ethics (<https://www.thecdi.net/about-us/cdi-code-of-ethics>)

# CHAPTER 2. METHODS AND TOOLS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Career guidance and counselling is about learning to develop career management skills. The main tool in achieving this goal is the careers teaching that reaches all learners in a school. This chapter introduces career guidance officers to several methods and tools that can be utilised to better support students. It also provides guidelines for communicating with students' parents or caregivers.

## 2.1. Working with students

Students develop in unique and distinct ways. Here are some tools to better support students.

### Tools to gather information about students

When a student visits the career guidance office, the first step for the officer is to understand the student's personal history and objectives. The Career Guidance Officer is there to empower the student into better career decision making as the career choice is ultimately made by the student. Below you can find a series of tools that can be used to help identify the students' possible interests and skills. It is however vital to communicate clearly that people will change careers multiple times in their lives, and while this first decision is important, it is not a decision that will result in a job for life. Therefore, it is even more important for the officer to consider labour market intelligence and go beyond just giving information and letting students get on with gaining real life work experience. Career conversations with students are the place to reflect upon experiential learning and the information acquired to support decision making.

#### Career interviews

The career interview is the chance to gather more data about the student. The interview is an informal way of gathering information but one that adds a personal touch and should be used in building rapport with the student and establishing a relationship. The interview will also help the student evaluate their goals, motivations, and values. The interview might be used to discuss any topics that could affect career choice, including strengths, talents, hobbies, and past experiences. Discuss any feelings or beliefs about various careers that may interest or intrigue them with the student. The interview will allow the officer to assess the student's career-related perceptions. More importantly, the interview will help the student reflect on their own situation, which will often generate discussion and bring up additional ideas.

#### Career interest inventories and Aptitude tests

Interest inventories compare individual interests to those of the general population, identifying areas where someone has a higher-than-average interest. Individual interests are compared with interests of people who have a high degree of job satisfaction in particular occupations. The surveys can stimulate students to explore certain careers and are helpful in the career decision-making process where students learn more about themselves and the world of work. Interest inventories help students focus their interests on jobs within specific career areas. Today, you can find many career interest inventories both in written and digital form. Some inventories can be given to groups and may require two to three sessions to complete.

In addition to a career interest inventories, a separate values inventory or checklist pinpoints values that could be incorporated in the job search.

An aptitude test can assess a student's strengths and abilities and it highlights areas that need improvement.

## **Student Portfolio/Database**

Each student should be encouraged to keep a portfolio. This portfolio should include records of the student's achievement, test scores, college entrance tests, aptitude tests or surveys, interest inventories, skills assessments and a statement of the student's personal goals and objectives. Any other information that helps a student set goal or shows their ability to achieve required job skills should be kept in the portfolio. The portfolio can be used to help create a CV when they start applying for jobs.

Life/work portfolios help students articulate and plan career and life goals. Tailored to the individual, easy-to-use personal planners and portfolios help students figure out who they are and what they want. These tools help students develop career management skills, and in particular:

Understand the relationship between their education and work skills

Document their progress and accomplishments

Take responsibility for managing their lives

## **Skills passport**

Another important tool to use is the moderated self-assessment of skills resulting in an overview of skills at diverse competence levels. This helps in the identification of important transversal key competences acquired also outside of formal education and helps to build a skills-based self-understanding resulting in an awareness that lifelong learning is a means to maintain and increase skills and thereby employability. It also supports CV writing and applications, next to identifying where to invest in next to enhance skills.

## **Career exploration**

At different points in time throughout the VET education path, students should be supported into hands-on experience of the world of work, because this helps develop occupational interests beyond their existing knowledge and expose them to new sectors and occupations. You can also back up in-depth exploration into a particular occupation using computer or online resources. At the end of their VET course, students should have a clear idea of what they want and of what they can potentially do. Continuous career talks with representatives from different sectors and organisations (large companies, SMEs, start-ups, chambers of commerce, unions, etc.) are key to reaching this goal as well. Job shadowing is a particularly valuable method to observe someone on the job and understand what they actually do. Students need to gather as much information as possible on the duties, realities, myths, the pleasant and the not-so-pleasant aspects of the occupation in question. What is important at the end of the day is the reflection upon those experiences shared in a classroom, group or during individual sessions.

### **Indicative list of questions that might help a student obtain information on a qualification or occupation**

- What are the academic specialisms/degrees or training experience that I need in order to be qualified for this occupation?
- What advice would you give to someone thinking about pursuing a career in this area?
- What are the most rewarding and least rewarding aspects of your job?
- What specific skills do you require for this position?
- What additional training, if any, do you need in this occupation once you are hired? (e.g., continued personal development, renewing a licence or certificate, etc.)
- What is a typical day like for you?
- Do you see any interesting trends for this career field in the future?

### Aspects to consider in careers guidance and counselling

- 1. Conduct customised counselling sessions.** During counselling sessions, it is important that the officer and student discuss any conflicts or inconsistencies in the results of the interview. For example, students' job values may not match their job choices. It is important for counsellors to get across that career decision-making is a lengthy process and cannot be decided in one or two sessions.
- 2. Update the career portfolio and define a personal career development plan.** Counsellors should help students keep their career portfolio up to date and map out a personal career development plan. Together they investigate areas for further skills development, for career exploration, visits, etc. Once the student has a plan, you can address additional issues such as financial aid for extracurricular activities or further learning and education at the end of the VET course.

## 2.2. Parents/Caregivers

The three main objectives of the career guidance officer's work with the parents or caregivers of a VET student are:

### Help parents/caregivers understand the labour market and overcome gender stereotypes

Often parents, with the best intentions, try to impose interests onto their children or influence gender related career decisions. Therefore, it is very important to provide evidence about the real needs of the labour market, opportunities and growing sectors due to automation and digitalisation, for example, and to raise their awareness of the latest developments and opportunities. Exposing parents to role models like female entrepreneurs, women in tech or male nurses also helps open their minds.

### Know Your Child

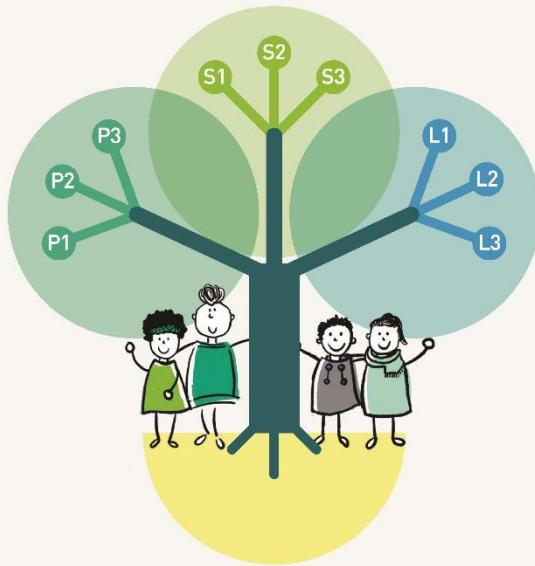
Children have many kinds of strengths. Sometimes these strengths are obvious, like when a kid is really good at drawing or playing sports. But some strengths can be harder to spot – like being a good listener or working well in groups. Recognising and talking about these strengths can help children thrive. This is especially true for kids who are struggling in school. A Career Guidance Officer should help the parents/caregivers identify their child's strengths by sharing or going through the annexed list with them and their children.

This non-exhaustive list of the main strengths or talents a student might harbour is available in Annex 1 and is divided into character strengths, social strengths, logic strengths, study skills strengths and other strengths or talents. Another way of approaching the wide variety of strengths people have is to look at skills frameworks that outline a large range of relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, zooming in on cognitive and socio-emotional skills. Discussing such frameworks with learners helps them recognise unconscious skills and strengths and at the same time recognise new areas of learning relevant to their life and work:



# LifeComp

A European competence framework  
for better lives in our uncertain world



## P1 Self-regulation

Awareness and management of emotions, thoughts, and behaviour

## P2 Flexibility

Ability to manage transitions and uncertainty, and to face challenges

## P3 Wellbeing

Pursuit of life satisfaction, care of physical, mental and social health; and adoption of a sustainable lifestyle

## S1 Empathy

The understanding of another person's emotions, experiences and values, and the provision of appropriate responses

## S2 Communication

Use of relevant communication strategies,

domain-specific codes and tools, depending on the context and the content

## S3 Collaboration

Engagement in group activity and teamwork acknowledging and respecting others

## L1 Growth Mindset

Belief in one's and others' potential to continuously learn and progress

## L2 Critical Thinking

Assessment of information and arguments to support reasoned conclusions and develop innovative solutions

## L3 Managing Learning

The planning, organising, monitoring and reviewing of one's own learning

## Why is it important...

### → for your students?



Socioemotional competences boost students' academic success and give them increased chances to get job satisfaction, financial stability, and better health and wellbeing.



Today's students are likely to work with tools that do not exist yet. Having a growth mindset, being a critical thinker and being able to manage one own learning is key to thriving in a rapidly changing world.

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Joint  
Research  
Centre

Life competences will increase the resilience of students and educators tackling current and future disruptions (Covid-19, environmental and financial crisis...)

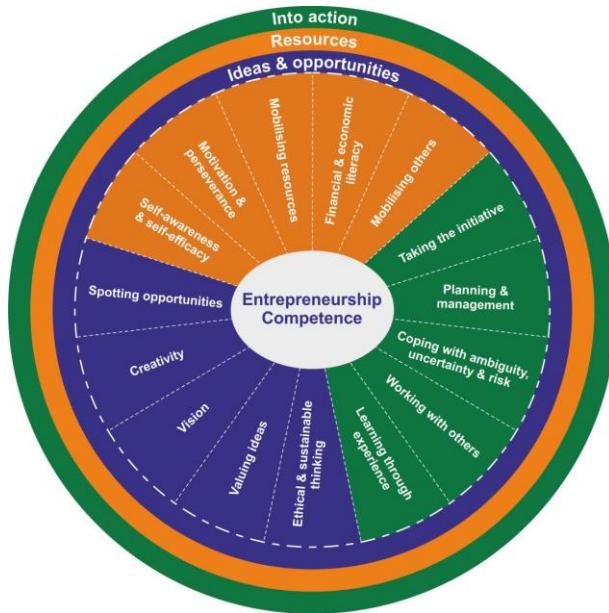
Cultivating LifeComp competences will help you innovate education through learner-centred pedagogies.

To live and work in times of rapid technological innovation (automation, artificial intelligence), LifeComp can help you enhance the human skills needed for the future.

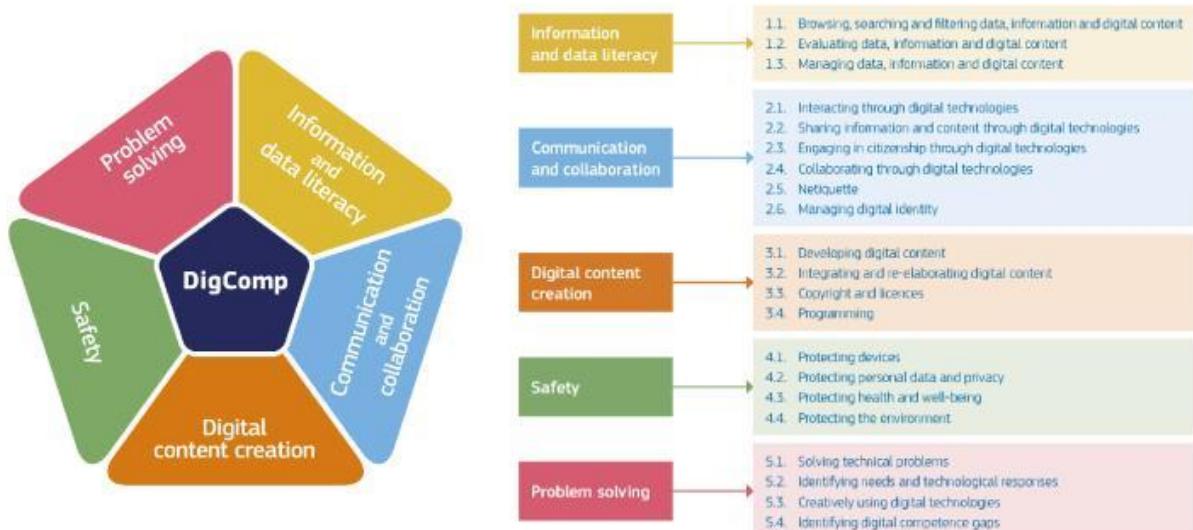


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## **Supporting your child**

Career Guidance Officers need, in some cases, to meet the student's parents as they are the key people in their child's life. Sometimes, it may feel like the children are trying to push parents away, but they are actually trying to push *themselves* away from their parents to make their own way in life and to shape an identity for themselves as a separate, independent person. Love, support, trust, and optimism from their family will make them feel safe and secure, and are powerful weapons against peer pressure, challenges and disappointments. These are some of the things a parent/caretaker can do to support their child:

- Actively encouraging them to do their best with school, their hobbies, and interests
- Listening without judgement and seeking to understand their concerns and challenges
- Acknowledging their achievements and supporting them through mistakes and challenges
- Setting consistent expectations and consequences to help them to feel secure and able to predict outcomes
- Treating them fairly and developing a trusting relationship

# CHAPTER 3. SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH GUIDANCE WORK

Following the logic of a whole school approach, career guidance is closely linked to supporting the general well-being of learners, because career education classes aim to develop important transversal key skills and support learners with academic and other problems that might put them at risk of dropping out. This chapter includes several ideas for nurturing the general well-being of students and how career guidance officers can create an inclusive environment, avoid academic setbacks, and address the particular needs of students with learning difficulties.

## 3.1. Creating a welcoming environment

First impressions matter. Nervousness and anxiousness are normal for students during their first few weeks as they are faced with new concepts as well as the pressure of adapting to their new environment. This is why establishing a welcoming space for the students is important to help alleviate the stress. Maintaining this type of environment makes sure that students always feel comfortable and always come forward for guidance when they need it.

Below are some pointers on how to create and maintain a welcoming environment:

- Use students' first names from day one. Referring to a student by their first name from the very start creates a sense of familiarity. Calling someone by their first name is an indicator that you know someone.
- Share your story. Do not limit your introduction to the student to a list of credentials. Try incorporating the reason that brought you into your current job. Sharing personal stories helps the students to get to know you better, and no matter how old a story seems to you, remember that it will still be brand new for your students.
- Show an interest in students. This does not necessarily mean knowing every detail about their lives, but getting to know the student on a more personal level helps in developing a welcoming environment and a trust-based relationship.
- Prioritise high-quality career guidance officer-to-student relationships. Schedule office hours or one-on-one meeting times. Make sure to get to know your students and allow them space to discuss their needs and individual questions.
- Create a supportive and caring guidance environment. Talk about your own stories of failure and resilience. Commend students' strengths.
- Be sensitive to students' needs and emotions. Not all students learn or participate in the same way. It may take some students time to learn to speak up in a group discussion – consider other ways they can participate in discourse.
- Focus your emphasis on what a student can do, not what they cannot. Using a positive voice is always helpful. Instead of going over what is prohibited by regulations for a given scenario or situation, try offering alternatives instead. A very simple and basic example: If the school rules is that fizzy drinks are not allowed, try switching the emphasis to something else that is. Instead of 'No fizzy drinks' why not try, 'Water bottles allowed.'
- Promise to give your best. It is commonly known that students are always asked to give and be their best on every occasion. To create a warm and welcoming environment, and to give students a sense of reassurance. Try promising the students that you too will be giving them your best. This can be as simple as: 'I will work hard for you, and I will give you my best.'

Career education brings advisors into contact with all students and creates a good basis for closer cooperation.

## 3.2. Maintaining an engaging environment

Student life is somewhat repetitive with ups and downs that could divert attention at any point during the academic period. This is why maintaining an engaging environment during career guidance sessions is important to hold a student's attention over time.

Below are some pointers on how to keep the students engaged in their work:

- **Utilising tools and methods that fit the exact needs of the learners:** it is essential to consider that one size does not fit all when you provide counselling and guidance with learners.
- **Motivation:** Motivation gives students a sense of purpose when pursuing their target path, as well as a sense of achievement when they reach their desired goals. In addition, motivation is needed for students to maintain their attention. Ideally, individualised instructions for each student during each stage of guidance is the best way to keep a student engaged since you will be targeting their personal interest. However, a general rule of thumb that can be followed is to ground any theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios and to draw on examples from daily routines.
- **Utilising multiple methods:** Efficient guidance is best achieved by presenting the material in multiple modes (i.e., aural, visual, and sensorial learning). Incorporating different methods of presenting information in a given workshop or activity will definitely help in keeping the students engaged for the long run.
- **Involving students in guidance activities:** In essence, people like to design experiences for others and for themselves. If a student has personally contributed to an activity, they are much more likely to remain interested and intrigued to see how things turn out.
- **Targeting the proximal zone of development:** If a student deems the current activity or what is being discussed is too hard, their attention will be lost. Similarly, if a student thinks it is too trivial, their attention will again be lost. When planning a guidance activity or initiating a discussion you should always aim to be in between hard and trivial: this is what Vygotsky calls the proximal zone of development. It maximises the likelihood that they will stay alert and interested.
- **Incorporating the unexpected:** It is always a good idea to shake things up every once in a while. This can be done by telling a story, cracking a joke, showing a picture or even communicating using a different medium. Psychologist Annie Murphy Paul says: "Human beings quickly become habituated to the status quo...When something in our environment shifts, however, we start paying attention again."
- **Capturing ideas in a narrative:** Communicating a certain idea in the form of a story or a narrative helps students understand and remember them more accurately. Paul says, 'Researchers who study human cognition say that stories are "psychologically privileged" –that is, our minds treat them differently than other kinds of information. We understand them better, remember them more accurately, and we find them more engaging to listen to in the first place. When planning your presentation, think about how to capture your ideas in a narrative.'

## 3.3. Fostering independence

Students who learn autonomously are more capable than non-autonomous peers in critical thinking and problem-solving because their educational settings encourage these skills to develop. As mentioned before, if a student has personally contributed to a given activity, they are much more likely to remain interested and intrigued to see how things turn out. If students are permitted to choose their own adventure, so to speak, they will be inherently engaged. As an example, students can pick their own topic to be discussed during guidance sessions, presentation format, work experience, etc. There are also plenty of ways to achieve guidance objectives creatively. Giving students greater freedom and flexibility is an easy way to increase engagement.

Below are some pointers on how to foster greater independence in students.

- It is a good idea to tell students to utilise you as a 'last resort' option for trivial matters. Making them rely on themselves more often helps in promoting independence and autonomy, especially when they can turn to their peers for help in such matters (also fostering cooperation skills).
- Let them pick their own tools. For any given activity/task a student has to accomplish, it would be a good idea if the student is left with the choice of how to accomplish the task. Guidance is always an option, and you will always be there for help and advice, but in order to be independent, students must learn to make such decisions by themselves.
- Give the student control over what they will learn. Help them understand educational requirements and encourage them to come up with ways to meet them.
  - 'What would you like to study?'
  - 'What are you interested in learning more about?'
- Help them develop a range of possible options. Listen when they have suggestions.
  - 'What other possibilities could we consider?'
  - 'Can you think of anything else?'
- Support different ways of demonstrating knowledge. Brainstorm possibilities with the student, let them choose and then hold them accountable for their choices.
- Encourage them to use a planner or calendar. Provide one and show them how to use it.
  - 'You're very capable.'
  - 'Let me show you how you can remind yourself what needs to be done.'
- Keep the schedule flexible. Let them tell you what they would like to do when.
  - 'What do you need to accomplish today?'
  - 'How will you make sure those things get done before tomorrow?'
- Let the student define their own goals. Do not demand perfection.
  - 'What standards do you have for yourself?'
  - 'How accurate do you think this needs to be?'
  - 'Are you satisfied with your progress?'
- Guide them; do not direct them. Do not tell them how to do things.
  - 'I trust you to figure that out on your own. Let me know if you need help.'
- Ask open-ended questions. Listen attentively to the answers they offer.
  - 'What do you make of this?'
  - 'What are your thoughts?'
- Let them learn from their attempts. Do not correct them right away.
  - 'How did things go?'
  - 'Could you make it better somehow?'
  - 'What do you think?'

### 3.4. Fostering self-confidence

Self-confidence enables students to handle setbacks with ease. Instead of being crippled by failure, resilient students get back up quickly, learn from their mistakes and try again. They accept that failure is a part of life and take more chances as a result, which makes them even more successful later in life. Below, some pointers to foster and help students establish self-confidence:

- Help students practise self-acceptance
  - Encourage students to examine their strengths and weaknesses from a position of acceptance and self-love.
  - Foster the idea of addressing weaknesses without being too critical of oneself.
  - Let your students know that their self-worth is not dependent on their failures or successes.
- Focus on small achievements
  - It would be a good idea to create a list with the student with all the things that they have achieved so far. The size of the achievement does not matter, they are still accomplishments whether they are big or small.
  - Creating such lists will help in developing a sense of self-confidence and achievement. In addition to that, it gives the student something positive to look back to when they feel that they were set back by a failure.
- Set manageable goals
  - When it comes to improving a particular set of skills or addressing a weakness, it is important to teach the student to set themselves small and achievable goals at the beginning. Becoming comfortable with small steps can make the big steps seem less daunting and anxiety inducing.
- Seek positive surroundings
  - Being around critical and judgmental individuals can affect how we feel about ourselves. Help your students surround themselves with positive experiences and people to boost their self-confidence.
- Consider a reward system
  - Coming up with a reward system can be helpful for building the student's self-esteem and confidence. It can make a scary step or project seem much more fun and worthwhile. Simply giving praise to students can also work as a self-confidence boosting reward.

### 3.5. Supporting students

Students are not a homogenous group; they possess different personality traits, preferences, interests and levels of ambition. Career guidance officers should consider these potential differences and reflect them properly in their advice and orientation and overall interaction with students.

There is no doubt that students do progress at different levels during their education. Most students will end up achieving grade-appropriate results for the effort that they are putting in, some might go beyond that and do even better. However, some students experience learning difficulties and fail to achieve those grade-appropriate results. These students need additional support and adapted methods and tools for career guidance. Below we list some reasons as to why students might be underachieving academically and pointers on how to identify such cases and provide appropriate help.

### Some reasons for students to be underachieving

- Executive skills: Weak executive function impacts a person's working memory, organisation, planning and ability to stay on task.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): Often coupled with executive function issues, this disorder affects a student's ability to stay focused and is marked by inattention, impulsiveness, and hyperactivity. This should be diagnosed by a professional.
- Dyscalculia: This is a learning issue that affects a person's ability to make sense of numbers and maths concepts or grasp the language of maths. This should be diagnosed by a professional.
- Dyslexia: Presented as difficulty in connecting letters to the sounds they make; this condition affects how students process written and oral lessons. This should be diagnosed by a professional.
- Dysgraphia: This learning issue specifically affects writing. Often students have challenges with writing legibly, spelling age-appropriate words correctly or just getting their thoughts down on paper. This should be diagnosed by a professional.

### How to identify students who need additional learning support

Identifying students with learning difficulties is not a straightforward process. Was a low grade the result of having a bad day? Is it this specific content they are having trouble with, or the subject as a whole? Is their inattentiveness just part of maturity level issue or something more? As you see patterns emerge, you can start to identify students who are facing learning difficulties.

- The gap between ability and aptitude: One sign to look for is a widening gap between what a student has the ability to do and what they are actually doing. When obviously intelligent students do not earn the grades that reflect this, it is a red flag.
- Trying very hard with little success: When students are not trying hard enough, it is easy to diagnose. But what about the students who are trying their very best and not getting the results that their hard work deserves? This can be a sign of a learning difficulty.
- Straying off-track: Difficulty with multi-step directions, forgetting to complete or hand-in assignments or poor time management can be signs of a student with learning difficulties.

### Offering help

Beyond your own observations, give students a chance to self-identify their struggles. Use exit tickets, journal entries or other self-assessment tools. This allows students to take ownership of the fact that they need additional support. They can also bring learning difficulties to light sooner rather than later. At this point, the best course of action would be to notify the parents and offer means whereby the student can seek professional help.

# CHAPTER 4: GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYMENT

This chapter includes information on how to engage employer representatives, companies, and trade unions to establish collaborations and acquire information about job vacancies, internships, work-based learning or other experiential learning opportunities, etc. It also includes a section on how to help students present themselves better to future employers or companies who are hosting them as interns, apprentices, or trainees.

## 4.1. Identifying labour market needs

In order to better evaluate where the curriculum of a given vocational school stands and to check the education provided aligns with labour market needs, it is important to understand the vocational needs of (surrounding) labour markets and in-demand skills at workplaces offering jobs. This, in turn, leads to a betterment of the technical school's ranking and means students are more likely to be matched to suitable open positions.

This analysis is carried out to provide students with relevant training and job opportunities.

### Establishing connections with the world of work

National and/or regional employer representatives, trade organisations, trade unions and public employment offices are key partners in careers guidance. Ideally, education ministries will foster cooperation between these bodies and schools, but schools can also establish their own sustainable relationships with local companies.

Companies often choose a technical institution for long -term collaboration to recruit students. It is the technical institution's responsibility to place itself in a position that attracts said companies, which is achieved by promoting a reputable and strong image of the school. Remember the career guidance office reflects the Technical Institute/school and should always show it in a positive light.

It is essential to contact target institutions' Human Resources (HR) departments for recruitment since it falls under their remit. A Career Guidance Officer can request information regarding recruitment from said department. The requested information can entail details about recruitment requirements, the industry, the company's scope of operations and the Career Guidance Officer graphical location of the institution. In turn, the technical institution should assess each company based on the information it has garnered. This information should be kept in a data sheet (such as Excel). Spreadsheets should include the institution's credentials: Company's name, sector, contact details, etc.

Below are some useful communication techniques to help establish that connection with companies:

- Phone
  - Introduce yourself and the institution you are representing.
  - Make sure that the person you are contacting is from the human resources department and that they can communicate your message to someone who makes the final decisions.
  - Remember to end the conversation on a positive note!
- E-mail
  - Make sure that the email is concise and addressed to the representative of the company.
  - Write in a professional manner and be clear and polite about what you are asking or requesting.
  - Be sure to end on a note of thanks.

- Presentation
  - Provide the company's decision maker with the relevant information about your institution and why your students would be a good match.
  - Offer the opportunities for collaboration that you are willing to offer.
- Careers fairs
  - Careers fairs allow institutions to showcase their capabilities to the invited companies as well as provide students with a chance to interact with company representatives.

## 4.2. Job and internship opportunities and getting students ready

### Identifying job and internship opportunities

Organisations representing the world of work are often approached to contribute to the career education programs run throughout the whole VET year. This is usually a win-win situation because employers have an interest in making contacts with new talent and learners want to learn more about the world of work, and particularly the kind that is best done through learning on the job.

Besides this (and promoting awareness of the institution), approaching companies is done to provide the students in the institution with job opportunities that they are suitable for. This can be done by inquiring about the job details: position's title, location, employment type and general description. Job descriptions include the responsibilities that the candidate will hold if employed and are typically essential for recruitment and selection, advertising, interviewing, and establishing performance standards.

Additionally, to be able to best match a student with a job vacancy, the Career Guidance Officer must have a thorough understanding of the student's technical skills. Matching a student with a position correctly promotes the institution's credibility and reputation and establishes a more solid professional relationship with the company.

To ensure that the selection process is done correctly, produce a student database and constantly update it with each student's technical skills and abilities. Then, compare the selection criteria to the information found in the database and draw your conclusions. Information in the database for each student includes the name of the student, contact and personal information, languages, certificates, training and achievements.

### Train students on employment tools

Most job applicants fail to present and represent themselves successfully to their prospective employers. Below are some tools that can guide career guidance officers and also help student applicants and graduates in securing their desired vocational position.

- **Resumes/CVs** are a student's first impression when it comes to their prospective employers. A CV should include the student's experience, education, achievements and qualifications clearly and objectively. This will allow the HR representative to read through the application effortlessly.
- **Cover letters** are usually sent alongside CVs by applicants with former work experience and include additional information regarding the applicant's experience, skills, and aspirations.
- **Job interviews** are formal meetings between the employers and the candidate where the employers inquire more about the applicants and their capabilities and evaluate them based on their responses.

- **Digital literacy:** workplaces have become increasingly digitised, with employees expected to engage with a wealth of IT programs, automated systems, online platforms and tools. However, most of these tools will be unfamiliar to students. Digital literacy should be taught in a way that is thought provoking and engaging; using real-world examples (with figures provided by industry partners/local business) and avoiding overly technical lectures.
- **Social media:** In today's digital age, students need to fully understand the importance of social media. Social media savviness is an essential skill regardless of a student's chosen career path. Today, social media is the best way for people and businesses to stay connected, share information, and swap services. Students must be ready for a digitally-driven workplace.
- **Hands-on learning opportunities** allow students to upskill by *doing*. Applied activities (like lab experiments, work placements, volunteer opportunities or research projects) provide students with a wealth of information and experience to reflect on and a safe environment to explore the process. These opportunities are a valuable addition to a student's resume/CV and can be used to answer competency-based interview questions.
- **Skills training:** Employers report that students are often unprepared to join the workforce. Brainstorming sessions and group work nurture teamwork and analytical skills; and interpersonal skills and communication can be encouraged with role-playing assignments, or even be placed in client-facing positions. The integration of desirable soft skills also adds to the value of a student entering the labour market by actively improving their employability.
- **Careers information** should be readily available to students via desktop computers and mobile devices. A careers hub should also be frequently updated with local vacancies and volunteer opportunities, and list school projects and extracurricular activities. Booking a session with the Career Guidance Officer should be straightforward, too, and the value of workshops shouldn't be ignored. Workshops can cover topics (e.g., CV writing, interviewing, and job hunting) in greater depth, and provide a space for students to ask questions and receive personalised advice and feedback.
- **Networking:** it's never too early for students to start networking while studying at school. The earlier the students start, the better prepared they'll be when it comes time to look for a job. Networking can be promoted by providing access for students to work-integrated learning schemes such as internships and volunteer work. These schemes are fantastic for connecting students with local businesses and helping them grow their networking skills.

## FINAL MESSAGE

The above guiding principles, tools and methods provide the general outline for establishing, developing, and delivering career guidance services in VET schools. The content of this how-to guide has been developed using the experience the ETF and its partners acquired in Lebanon when implementing policy and capacity building support in the area of career guidance and counselling at both a policy and schools' level.

It is based on direct experience and suggestions made by education decision-makers, teaching staff, careers counselling experts and advisors, business sector representatives and other stakeholders.

Each country's education system, particularly VET, has its own specificities, such as structure, performance, teaching and counselling staff, equipment or use of digital means. Therefore, this paper provides a general direction of travel for career guidance services in VET schools.

Actual follow-up and implementation of work aimed at building up the capacities for career guidance capacity in VET schools should be carefully adapted and take into consideration local and national specificities, and in particular feasibility, resourcing, sustainability, etc.

From ETF experience we note that longer-term planning of interventions and support activities for newly established career guidance offices and its staff are crucial. Labour market and students' expectations and career prospects are changing fast, and resources should be ringfenced for continuing staff training and adapting career guidance methods, tools, instruments and means (e.g., office equipment, digital updates).

# ANNEX 1 – COMPONENTS OF CAREER GUIDANCE WORK IN SCHOOLS

Below is an indicative list of various components of career guidance work in schools.

## **Orientation activities**

1. The promotional campaign
2. School visits
3. Open Days
4. Knowing yourself
5. Considering your academic abilities
6. Vocational preference types (the RIASEC test)
7. Success Story testimonials

## **Guidance activities**

1. The guidance meeting
2. Finding things that are important to you
3. Session with first-year students' parents
4. Classroom visits
5. Building a career plan

## **Employment activities**

1. Presentation on the labour market by professionals and local employment office
2. Job and Orientation Fair
3. The professional interview
4. The careers guidance programme
5. Careers guidance after graduation
6. How to succeed in a job interview
7. Independent job searches
8. Careers week
9. Careers forum
10. Introduction to internships
11. Contacting companies
12. Monitoring internship students in the field
13. Graduate tracer study
14. Setting up and coordinating the alumni network

## ANNEX 2 – INDICATIVE LIST OF STUDENTS’ STRENGTHS AND TALENTS

### ▪ **Character strengths**

Honest and trustworthy

Caring and kind

Helpful

Empathetic

Loyal

Hardworking

Resilient

Independent

Cooperative

Eager

Curious

### ▪ **Social strengths**

Shares and can compromise

Tries to be a good conversation partner and not interrupt too much

Puts effort into making friends and keeping them

Is a good listener

Likes to help and is sensitive to the needs of others

Accepts differences in others

Asks for help when needed

Has ways of coping when frustrated

Knows when it is OK to follow the crowd and when to resist peer pressure

Accepts personal responsibility for actions both good and bad

Can be redirected away from a negative situation to a positive one

Does not argue when told by adults what to do

Tells the truth and can apologise when needed

Has a good sense of humour

### ▪ **Logic strengths**

Has strong number sense

Sees and understands patterns in nature and in numbers

Solves puzzles or word problems

Likes playing games that involve strategy, like chess

Likes taking things apart and figuring out how they work

### ▪ **Study skills strengths**

Understands and sets goals

Can plan ahead

Is a self-starter

Can ignore distractions and stay focused on tasks

Can think about something in more than one way (flexible thinking)

Keeps information in mind long enough to use it in some way (working memory)

Organises thoughts and physical items like a backpack

Follows rules and routines well  
Can keep track of time and obligations  
Can recognise and try to control 'big feelings'  
Can pause to think through decisions or choices  
Can learn from mistakes and solve problems  
Self-advocates/asks for help  
Can work or play independently  
Works well/gets along well one-on-one  
Works well/gets along well in groups  
Has a growth mindset and believes skills can improve with effort

■ **Other strengths and talents**

Is creative  
Likes drawing  
Can dance, act, sing, or play a musical instrument  
Can swim or play sports  
Practices yoga, mindfulness or meditation  
Is gentle with animals and/or younger children  
Enjoys entertaining people by telling jokes or stories  
Likes doing community-service projects  
Likes problem-solving in video games

# ACRONYMS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CDI	The Career Development Institute
CMS	Career Management Skills
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ETF	European Training Foundation
DigComp	The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens
EntreComp	The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework
HR	Human Resources
IAEVG	The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance
IECD	Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement
LifeComp	The European framework for the personal, social and learning to learn key competence
RIASEC	Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional (Personality Types)
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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