



Ethics in Guidance

**Ethical Guidelines for Educational
and Vocational Guidance in Denmark**

 **R·U·E**



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Erhvervsvejledning 2003
(The Danish National Council for Educational
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Design and layout

Punch Design Productions

Printed by

Kailow Graphic, Copenhagen

ISBN: 87-7773-443-2

*Ethical Guidelines for Educational and Vocational
Guidance in Denmark* is also available on R.U.E.'s
web site

Published by

Rådet for Uddannelses- og Erhvervsvejledning
(The Danish National Council for Educational
and Vocational Guidance)

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*The ethical guidelines for educational and vocational
guidance were adopted by the National
Council for Educational and Vocational
Guidance in May 1995.*

*Prior to adoption, a committee was appointed,
and subsequently, guidance counsellors and
authorities and organisations that have a con-
nection with the guidance field were consulted.
This consultation showed a considerable and
varied interest in ethics and guidance, and state-
ments and viewpoints from the debate have
been worked into the introductory remarks and
into the actual guidelines.*

Preface


Educational and vocational guidance takes place in settings with many different and sometimes contradictory interests. Each individual seeking guidance¹ tries to meet his/her own needs, taking into account personal qualifications and skills. It is in the interest of society that the individual achieves a satisfactory education and career position, but also that guidance is offered in due consideration of future employment possibilities. From the perspective of the labour market, there is an advantage in maintaining and developing the qualifications of the labour force so that they correspond to present and future needs. The social partners (employers, employees and trade unions) have a common interest in a labour force that is satisfied with the jobs they undertake. The educational sector focuses on providing pupils and students with qualifications and skills which are in accordance with academic and professional objectives. It is in the interest of the authorities employing guidance counsellors that their institutions provide professional educational and vocational guidance which would have a positive impact on their own institution. The guidance counsellors have a professional interest in providing the best possible guidance

service to their clients. Furthermore, the guidance counsellors may be subject to explicit or implicit pressure from management or colleagues in relation to obtaining certain results through guidance activities. And from the point of view of politicians, there is an interest in using the education system and employment possibilities to move society in certain directions.

The present ethical guidelines aim to ensure that educational and vocational guidance is based on the concept of humanity that underlies the United Nations' World Declaration of Human Rights as well as the ILO convention concerning vocational training and guidance in connection with the development of human resources.

The central elements in this conception of humanity are a fundamental respect for the individual and a recognition of equality and the individual's right to self-determination. This implies that the wishes, background and needs of the client must always be the starting point in educational and vocational guidance activities, and that the client's responsibility for – and right to – making his/her own decisions must be accepted and respected.

1. Henceforth referred to as the client.



According to the present ethical guidelines, educational and vocational guidance is viewed as a process involving an interaction between information, education, practical activities and personal interviews; a process which will constitute the basis for making a choice concerning education, training and career and the living conditions associated with these. Guidance thus becomes a development-oriented, pedagogical and often also social dialogue with the guidance counsellor and the client as active participants. The contents, the experiences and the value of the elements incorporated are transformed into knowledge, experience and awareness that in turn form the basis of the client's decision-making.

Ethics and Morality

On a philosophical level, the connection between ethics and morals is unambiguous: ethics is the philosophical reflections on the good life with and for other people. Morality is a society's, group's or given epoch's understanding of which qualities, practical principles and rules of behaviour are good and correct, and which are evil and wrong.


The drawing up of ethical guidelines for

educational and vocational guidance thus does not express a definitive truth, but should be seen as a contribution to an ongoing discussion of the values in guidance.

Ethical guidelines for guidance activities or for guidance counsellors?

It is open to discussion whether the ethical guidelines should apply to guidance activities or to guidance counsellors. In this case it has been decided to draw up the guidelines for guidance activities, primarily to emphasise that, irrespective of where guidance takes place, it is presumed to follow the same basic principles, and the ethical guidelines should be part of these principles.

Furthermore, it is open to discussion whether "ethical rules" or "ethical guidelines" should be worked out for educational and vocational guidance. As a consequence of laying down ethical rules for guidance, the individual guidance counsellor, in case of violation of the rules, could in principle be held responsible and with that be liable for damages. From a legal point of view, guidelines are less binding than rules. Since the principal aim is to increase the awareness



of ethics in guidance, ethical guidelines have been chosen as the most suitable form.

Ethics and quality

Laying down general ethical guidelines for all guidance activities may contribute to raising the quality of guidance which will be of benefit to the clients – young people as well as adults. At the same time, the connection between ethics and quality in guidance implies that there is a need for a more elaborate definition and description of the components of high-quality guidance.

Equality

The drive to achieve equality has been such a central feature of the development of society in recent years that the issue of equality is also of great importance in educational and vocational guidance.

Equality in educational and vocational guidance relates to both gender and ethnicity.

Gender equality

Educational and vocational guidance must promote the individual's potential irrespective of gender, both in relation to the

education system and the labour market. The client must be able to shape his/her own life in accordance with his/her abilities and interests even if these interests clash with what is generally seen as being “normal”.

Educational and vocational guidance should have a broad perspective and stress possibilities rather than limitations. Moreover, guidance should produce a basic knowledge of working life, including gender-based segregation in the labour market. Educational and vocational guidance should not only focus on working life, but should explore the connection between working life and family life as a whole.

Ethnic equality

Educational and vocational guidance of clients from minority ethnic groups should enable them to make the same broadly based choices regarding education, training and occupation as all other clients. The guidance counsellor should pay attention to the fact that cultural and social differences and the client's expectations are elements which may be of particular importance in the guidance process.



The joint responsibility of the guidance counsellor and the client

Each individual guidance counsellor must be aware of his/her professional identity, and acknowledge that he/she and the client have a joint responsibility for the guidance process. It is only when this is being observed that the provision of guidance is qualitatively in accordance with the ethical guidelines.

Ethical Guidelines

Respect

Respect for the client and his/her right to self-determination forms the basis of all guidance activities.

Guidance must take its point of departure from the integrity and sovereignty of the client in relation to choices and decisions. Guidance must not be controlled by the interests of the guidance counsellor.

It is the task of the guidance counsellor to ensure a balance between, on the one hand, stimulating and challenging the client to reflect and, on the other, respecting his/her interests.

It is fundamental to any guidance activity that all choices are made by the client.

There must be neither a hidden – nor openly declared – intention of reaching a certain result for the client in any part of the guidance process.

There is a risk that the guidance counsellor, out of respect for the client, refrains from presenting viewpoints and perspectives which the client will not immediately want to be confronted with. In the worst case, this may lead to meaningless guidance. The ethically defensible guidance

process, on the other hand, often involves elements of confronting and challenging the client.

Respect for the client implies that educational and vocational guidance should have as its declared aim the improvement of the individual's basis for decision-making, the encouragement of individual action and the support of independent decisions based on sound information.

Impartiality

Guidance must be neutral and impartial.

Guidance must safeguard the interests of the client – and not promote political interests, the interests of individual institutions or authorities or other special interests.

Guidance will always reflect the time and place in which the guidance is carried out, the experience of the guidance counsellor, the existing possibilities within society, regulatory requirements, economic conditions etc. These conditions must be made clear to the guidance counsellor and the client. Since the dependence on various conditions cannot be eliminated, the important thing is to become aware of it. Such awareness will increase the possibility



of constructive conduct.

In all parts of the guidance process, it is of fundamental importance that the interests of the client are considered. Consequently, impartiality is a fundamental requirement in relation to guidance.

The guidance counsellor should be aware of his/her own norms and ideas so that they do not inadvertently undermine those of the client during the guidance process.

Guidance activities must be independent of interests that stem from the fact that the guidance counsellor is employed by a particular institution or public authority. For instance, a particular institution's or authority's interest in recruitment or in certain choices made in the course of educational or activation programmes² must not in any way influence the guidance process.

This also applies to political interests – e.g. a political goal of increasing the intake to certain areas of the educational system or the labour market – must not influence the guidance process.

The need for neutrality and independence also applies to information resources used in the guidance process. The sole purpose of the resources must be to support the personal choice of the client.

Guidance resources must not be shaped in such a way that they exploit the client's incomplete insight and experience, e.g. through inappropriate promotion of some goal, or by omission.

In the meeting between the guidance counsellor and the client, the relative strength of the different parties should always be kept in mind. Complete neutrality is not possible. For the guidance counsellor, the ethical challenge is to use this power to encourage the realisation of the client's full potential. The guidance conversation is not an encounter between equal partners.

2. All unemployed persons in Denmark have a right and a duty to participate in an activation programme after a certain period of unemployment. The objective and the contents of the activation programme are described in a personal activation plan.



Transparency

The overall framework and conditions of the guidance process should be explicitly stated.

There must be openness concerning any institutional affiliation.

In cases where it is the duty of the guidance counsellor to pass on information or where he/she has functions that entail control and limitation in relation to the client, this must be made clear.

The question of transparency concerns every step of the guidance process so that the client is able to assess the individual elements of the process.

Therefore, the affiliation of the guidance counsellor must always be clear in the guidance process. If the guidance counsellor is responsible for other functions in relation to the client, the client must be informed of this. This also applies when a guidance counsellor, as an employee of an institution or public authority, has as his/her task to recruit clients for training or to refer clients to activation programmes.

Where guidance resources are concerned, it should always be clear who the publisher is.

Confidentiality


All guidance interviews must be confidential.

In cases where the guidance counsellor is obliged to pass on information to others according to current legislation, the client must be informed which information has to be passed on. The guidance counsellor must only pass on information of a factual nature, i.e. no personal assessments.

It is of vital importance for the guidance process that the client can trust that the interview takes place in confidence. If the guidance counsellor needs to discuss the client's situation with others, this can only take place with the client's permission.

The guidance counsellor may have a duty to pass on information according to current legislation. This may be to a superior – e.g. the director of the institution – or to other authorities like the social services department or the police. In case of doubt, the guidance counsellor should always look into which type of information has to be communicated to others if requested.

The client must always be informed – and wherever possible in advance – about the



information that is passed on. The duty to pass on information only concerns factual information. The personal assessments of the guidance counsellor or others must never be communicated to others.

referring the client to other guidance systems that may contribute to the client's clarification and choice.

Accuracy

Information given to clients must be correct and updated.

The guidance material must be adequate and include relevant aspects concerning the choice of education, training and employment as well as the life style associated with it.

The need for accuracy concerning information used in the guidance process is of course crucial to the quality of the guidance process and to the client's confidence in the guidance offered. This relates to volume, depth and ongoing updating.

It has to be possible for the client to base his/her decision on guidance resources that are accurate and impartial, up to date and correctly dated.

In order for the guidance process to be adequate, it is essential that the guidance counsellor is aware of the possibility of

Preconditions

Vocational and educational guidance which is carried out in accordance with these recommended guidelines presupposes a high degree of professionalism and responsibility among the guidance counsellors.

The foundation of such professionalism and quality must be secured by guidance counsellors and guidance resources as well as by institutions and public authorities.

- The National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (R.U.E.)³ and other producers of general guidance resources must ensure that these are both informative, accurate and impartial. Different sectors, educational institutions and others who produce guidance material must do so in a way that clarifies any bias they might have.
- Institutions and managers have the particularly important responsibility of establishing a framework for guidance activities that makes it possible to follow the ethical guidelines. This implies that there must be adequate premises and material for guidance activities, and that there should be sufficient time both to carry out the actual guidance activities and for co-operation between

the guidance counsellors. It also means that guidance should be rendered visible and defined in relation to other functions so that the client is never in doubt where and when guidance is provided.

- The authorities that have the overall political and administrative responsibility for guidance services must extend and develop the foundation for the professional qualifications which are a necessary condition for professional guidance. More than anything, this will require development of better training programmes for guidance counsellors. All guidance counsellors must be assured of initial and continuing training so that they are able to offer competent and ethical guidance both professionally and personally. In other words, the encouragement of a general understanding and acknowledgement of the necessity of an ethical basis for guidance has not been the only objective of the present recommended guidelines. Essentially, the aim has been to encourage the relevant actors to take the necessary steps at a personal, institutional and politico-administrative level to adopt such standards.

3. Due to a new act on educational and vocational guidance adopted by the Danish Parliament in April 2003, R.U.E. will be closed down in January 2004.





Published with the support
of the European Community
within the framework of the
Leonardo da Vinci programme

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