

Career guidance in the Hungarian educational system in the light of new regulations

*Motto: "Within certain limits it makes almost no difference what you learn. The difference is if somebody has graduated from a university or not, has passed the 50-60 exams required or not. It is all the same because it is not engineering technology, civil law or the EU legal system that students learn but how to prepare from 100 pages in 3 days, realize how much time is needed for that. It is expected that in midwife training it has to be taught that if the baby lies in this way then the baby has to be touched that way. This doesn't have to be taught at a university. Although a recently qualified midwife is inexperienced, she knows essentially everything about the technique, well, she may not be experienced enough. However, a recently graduated economist, for example, has every right to think that s/he knows nothing, nevertheless if s/he wants to work as a midwife s/he will learn that profession fast and make a good midwife."*¹

Two objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy refer to the problem of career guidance: It has to be ensured that the employment rate among the 20-64 year old population reaches 75 per cent. In the field of education the dropout rate must be reduced to below 10 per cent. It has to be achieved that at least 40 per cent of the 30-34-year old population in the European Union have higher education qualification. The objective of Hungary as a member state is to achieve a 75 per cent employment rate. In the summer of 2011 the employment rate was 53 per cent and the unemployment rate was 11 per cent. Therefore significant efforts have to be made to achieve the objectives set by the Union by 2020. For the next decade the aim of Hungary as a member state is to reduce early school leaving rate to 10 per cent. In the last four years the rate of early school leavers was between 10 and 11 per cent, which is more favourable than the European Union average.² Taking into consideration the fact that in Hungary the rate of those leaving school early has stagnated for some years, the objective concerning this area seems to be achievable provided appropriate actions are taken. In higher education the objective of the national strategy is 30.3 per cent regarding student rate. Today in Hungary the aim is not a significant rise in the number of those in higher education but to increase the level of knowledge of those entering higher education, which can be achieved by measures resulting in quality improvement, while the student rate can also be slightly increased.³

The concept of Hungarian career guidance corresponds to that formulated by OECD and EU and includes activities like career information and advice giving, competence assessment, mentoring, supporting career decision-making, developing career management skills, which help citizens assess and identify their skills, competences, areas of interests and make decisions concerning training and employment. Thus in the world of learning and working they should be able to make and manage their own decisions.⁴

¹ Mindenki másképp egyforma, interview with Mérő László, Továbbtanulás, 1998 január

² In 2009 – 14.4%, Eurostart: http://portal.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/hun/thm/2/indi2_2_4.html. See also: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explaine/index.php?title=File:Youth_education_attainment_level_and_early_school_leavers_\(1\).png&filetimestamp=2010102852700](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explaine/index.php?title=File:Youth_education_attainment_level_and_early_school_leavers_(1).png&filetimestamp=2010102852700)

³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-QA-10-037-EN.PDF

⁴ Common EU/OECD definition of all career guidance activities.

These days the education system is being significantly transformed, which transformation will facilitate the achievement of set objectives along the intentions of the government. In the present government structure vocational training belongs to the Ministry for National Economy as opposed to educational government. Therefore this outline of educational changes will not include the new act on vocational training, which nevertheless affects the training and career opportunities of all students in vocational training.

Parliamentary debate on the new act on public education – expected to come into force in September 2012 – is underway. In the following I will describe the major elements of the draft bill concerning career guidance. In the introductory part of the draft bill the following challenge is formulated: “the effectiveness of education is deteriorating, the performance of students is decreasing in nearly all fields of education.” In response to this challenge the act will facilitate the improvement of the conditions required for effective education by introducing framework curricula that are mandatory to choose from, by raising the level of the secondary school-leaving examination and making the exam uniform and by organizing the system of external evaluations. In addition, the new act will create the framework for a differentiated and interoperable school system, where progression is only possible after fulfilling appropriate requirements. Concerning career guidance it will result in a more transparent system, where both monitoring students and students’ choices of institutions will become easier.

The other challenge concerning career guidance is that catch up programmes have remained unsuccessful: the danger of increasing gaps has not reduced and provision for the gifted has not become an organic part in the Hungarian institutional system. In response to this and to prevent lagging behind several new structural elements will be built into the system of public education, and provision for the gifted will be an organic part of this system. The new regulation aims at facilitating that nearly half of those completing public education will become capable for studies in higher education.

As far as concrete steps are concerned the draft bill states that disadvantages are present in many cases at the very point of entering the school system, therefore efforts should be made to reduce these disadvantages in the kindergarten. The draft bill says that: “kindergartens receive children from the age of 3, and kindergarten education will be mandatory from 2014. This is the general rule and exceptions can be only made in a regulated way, in the interest of the most appropriate development of the child, and on the written request of the parents.” All this will facilitate that a part of the children entering the system do not start their educational career with major disadvantages and the gaps in socialisation and basic skills of children coming from various social groups be reduced.

In the following the draft bill says: “Compulsory education starts at the age of 6 and lasts until the age of 16. Following general (primary) school or in the case of eight- or six-year secondary programmes starting from the 5th or the 7th year – all children can continue their studies in secondary education according to their capabilities, aspirations and knowledge and the entrance requirements of the secondary school.” The consequences of reducing compulsory education to the age of 16 cannot be seen yet, while all pupils have the

opportunity to remain in the system even above the age of 16 as education is free up to the secondary school-leaving examination.

A decisive factor is that transition between various school types should be possible, thus ensuring correction and change of career decisions. In the new system vocational training starts at the age of 15 and last until the age of 17. In general secondary schools, however, there will be the possibility to guide 16-year-old pupils not motivated to continue their studies in higher education to vocational education. Pupils may decide whether they want to obtain a secondary-school leaving certificate or enter into vocational training or seek employment on the labour market.

The optimum development of pupils with special educations needs and those with learning, or behavioural difficulties is regarded as a major task of the education system and its efficiency is ensured by extra services. Equal chances are to be ensured by abolishing the system of preparatory courses organized in educational institutions: "In general (primary) school it is forbidden to organize entrance examinations or preparatory courses for entrance. It is also forbidden to organize paying preparatory courses in secondary schools." The chances of children from disadvantaged social background may increase by entering institutions providing quality education. At the same time schools will have the opportunity to select gifted students "by completing central written examination with oral interviews or aptitude tests".

Interoperability of the school system is ensured by making transition from another school or school type possible even during a school year provided the requirements of the receiving schools are met. Transition is possible by simple reception, special tests, postponed special tests or repetition of the school year in order to facilitate catching up. Teachers of the receiving school can help newly entering students to settle curricular differences and/or fill the gaps. According to the draft bill a one-year training (Bridge programme) can be organised for pupils not suitable for starting secondary studies. All this can eliminate the differences resulting from differing intellectual and physical maturation and make career correction possible for young people.

The draft bill also includes that any school level of public education can be organised as adult education as well. Secondary school-leaving certificates can be obtained also in vocational training schools in the form of a 2-year evening training course. So the legal framework will make it possible for students of vocational training as well to enter higher education. Those who wish to obtain a secondary school-leaving certificate while working will have to opportunity to participate in digital courses.

Regulations concerning the secondary school-leaving examination have major implications for career guidance as well, as the results achieved decide about entering higher education. The function of this exam is to ensure the achievement of the quality objectives and the high level of public education through exam requirements and organisation: on the one hand it certifies the successful completion of secondary studies and on the other hand the readiness for continuing studies in higher education. The new element of the examination system, which may affect career guidance is that a precondition for starting the secondary school-leaving

exam is at least 50 hours of community service carried out by the student.⁵ Community service can take the form of a social, independent activity, serving the social environment of the student, independent of any material interest and can be carried out individually or in groups as a project. This activity can help students susceptible for social and health affairs find their future profession, work by learning by doing.

The National core curriculum provides the content framework of public education, which – contrary to the National core curriculum of 2007 – defines general education contents from the age of 6 to 18.

Due to the very small numbers of general subject hours in vocational training schools the National core curriculum regulates the whole of public education up to the 8th year only, after that year only general secondary schools and vocational secondary schools are covered by this law.

In the document career guidance is regarded as a major development goal. It says: “the general objective [of career guidance] is to facilitate further school and career choice of pupils. Its elements are: developing self-awareness based on recognising individual capabilities, skills; finding the most important careers, employment branches and paths leading to them by carrying out and experiencing activities. The school has to give the most comprehensive possible picture of the life of work – according to the age of the pupils and the possibilities of the school. In order to achieve this, such conditions and activities have to be ensured that can help pupils try their own capabilities, and engage deeper in areas of their interests. The general education contents of the cultural domain “Life and practice” present various professions and trades in accordance with age characteristics. This means that in years 1-4 there are common elements: getting to know simple work activities, presenting trades by playful activities; presenting the activities, tasks, jobs, work places of those living in a social environment. In years 5-8: modelling jobs, trades, work situations; characterising various trades, forms of employment, careers, making comparative analysis of work contents. These themes appear in years 9-12 as well with a depth in accordance with age characteristics. In addition in years 9-12 a broader career analysis appears: getting to know the social role of careers based on various work and forms of living. As a task students will have to find information in accordance with the personal career plan, individual ideas, and needs.

The draft bill of national higher education system refers briefly to the operation of existing career guidance offices. It says: “with their information giving and counselling system they help students find their places during their studies and after graduating”.

In addition to legal regulations several tools help students choose their careers. Based on a ministerial decision of 27 September 2007 a National Career Guidance Council was established. With their activities they help teachers, parents and pupils and coordinate career guidance tasks in the whole of public education. By collecting research data and by targeted research an appropriate background is provided for career guidance nationally.

⁵ The new system of secondary school-leaving exam will come into force in 2014 after being piloted.

This autumn a National career guidance portal⁶ was established, which helps students and their families find relevant information by presenting 150 informative materials and 42 films showing various trades and professions. The portal provides an opportunity for students to obtain information based on experiences and thus possess the necessary information when applying for entering a vocational training institution or the labour market.

This transformation according to the expectations formulated by the educational government can result in increasing the competitiveness of the education system in Hungary and rivalling with the education systems of other systems in the European Union. The level of Hungarian education will hopefully make the future generation capable for being successful on the European labour market, as the Hungarian trained labour force is sought on the foreign labour markets even today. The present education policy measures will only improve our present capabilities and competences.

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⁶ See: www.eletpalya.munka.hu