

## ===== EXPERIENCIAS =====

### CAREER TEACHERS AND QUALITY STANDARDS: AN INTERACTIVE APPROACH

#### PROFESORES DE EDUCACIÓN PARA LA CARRERA (EN SECUNDARIA) Y ESTÁNDARES DE CALIDAD: UN ENFOQUE INTERACTIVO<sup>1</sup>

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#### RESUMEN

Esta experiencia presenta los resultados parciales de un estudio llevado a cabo por el Centro Nacional para la Mejora de la Escuela (Utrecht, Holanda). En Holanda, la descentralización de las políticas educativas confiere mayor responsabilidad a los profesionales de la educación para asegurar la calidad en su contexto de trabajo. Durante dos años, se recogieron datos a través de una encuesta de ámbito nacional con profesores de educación para la carrera en escuelas de secundaria, para proponer estándares en relación a:

- las áreas fundamentales de intervención del profesor de educación para la carrera,
- las competencias necesarias para realizar las tareas pertinentes en cada una de estas áreas,
- indicadores de comportamiento en estas competencias.

El objetivo principal era y es generar un proceso interactivo y auto-evaluativo sobre la calidad de las actividades de desarrollo de la carrera en la escuela, no imponer unos estándares que regulen la calidad o sirvan de herramienta para medirla.

En esta contribución se describe el proceso seguido y sus resultados, con las áreas de intervención, tareas y competencias identificadas. Se hace énfasis en los procedimientos interactivos que han contribuido a que los profesores de educación para la carrera “hagan suyos” los estándares de calidad de las tareas que realizan. Se concluye con ejemplos de aplicación en el propio contexto de trabajo, y se apuntan líneas de acción futuras.

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<sup>1</sup> Esta experiencia se presentó como comunicación en el Congreso Mundial de la Asociación Internacional de Orientación Educativa y Profesional (IAEVG-AIOEP): *Quality Development in Vocational Counselling and Training*, 3-6 Septiembre 2003 Berna, Suiza. Publicada en CD-ROM. Se incluyen ligeras modificaciones referidas a la continuación del proyecto.

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## Introduction

Decentralised educational policies in the Netherlands, make practitioners more responsible for quality assurance at site-level. One area to elaborate can be standards for practitioners. During two years APS, National Centre for School Improvement in the Netherlands collected nationally data with career teachers from secondary schools, in order to compile standards for their work, referring to:

- the key areas for the career teacher,
- the competencies needed to fulfil the tasks in these key areas,
- behavioural criteria for these competencies.

The aim was and is to generate interaction about and self-evaluation of the quality of the career development activities in school, not to introduce standards that are binding, regulatory or a tool towards quality marking.

The Dutch results of this process will serve as examples in this article. We will focus on the interactive procedures that have contributed to reach 'ownership' among career teachers. And conclude with examples of applications on site-level.

## Context

In the Netherlands, the only public provision of career development for 12-19 year olds, is provided by educational institutions: secondary schools and community colleges.

These institutions are obliged to provide career development activities to students by law. There are no further guidelines. Funds for these activities are part of the lump sum. Furthermore, schools are provided with funds to buy any external expertise they need e.g. in the career development area.

In every secondary school one or more career teachers can be found. A school may appoint any person to be a career teacher and delegate the responsibility for career development activities for all students. A career teacher mostly is a subject teacher with an additional task. Doing an initial training in the career development area is rare for career teachers these last years. If trained, some 6 till 20 days are getting common among career teachers in the Netherlands.

Some career teachers are first in line with the students. In the majority of secondary schools however, tutors have a task in providing career support as well. In that case a career teacher will become a careers coordinator, who is second in line with the students.

## How to start with quality assurance in this context?

Career teachers may still long for central guidelines from the Ministry of Education, but this is no longer reality. Nowadays, the Dutch Educational Inspectorate validates only the quality assessment proceeded by the school itself. So, quality assurance is completely up to the school or site level: the initiative as well as the proceeding itself.

APS, the National Centre for School Improvement, has been supporting career teachers/coordinators within secondary education for many years by working with them in devising an approach for career development in the succeeding national educational reforms, developing concrete tools and by providing consultation and in-service training. We decided that national support in this process could only be instruments for quality assurance at site level. We call these instruments 'standards'. "A standard is a verifiable level of competence, which most professionals, in this case careers teachers and careers coordinators in secondary education, are able to strive for and attain." With standards it is more a question of *how* you do something, as opposed to what you do. It is coupled with a measure of behavioural adeptness, meaning that you see and/or hear it.

The standards consist now of manageable frames of reference for the tasks, competencies and behavioural criteria for careers teachers and careers coordinators in secondary education. We headed for instruments that can be used in schools for the purpose of self-evaluation and interaction.

Internationally, three national areas of focus are known when it comes to quality in career development activities (Plant, 2002). These are:

- information about (further) education, occupations and careers;
- the qualifications/competence of the staff in career
- the service itself.

We decided to start off with the second area: qualifications and competence of the staff in career, and specially the career teacher/coordinator. A subsequent project (from 2003 onwards) is focusing on the third area.

Three questions were approached in this phase:

- Which are the key areas: which results and for whom are expected in your school?
- What are the competencies you need to fulfil the tasks in these key areas: knowledge, skills, personal qualities?
- How can these competencies be assessed and used for self-evaluation and Human Resource Management in your school?

In 2001 and 2002, a series of three-day meetings were held with more than 60 careers teachers and careers coordinators to work on the standards set out in this publication. Each of the five groups took stock of and continued to build on their predecessors' developments. A report of every meeting was distributed among all the participants and the results were discussed with the professional organisations, and initial trainers.

The instruments are available, in Dutch, on the internet: [www.aps.nl/lob](http://www.aps.nl/lob). An English publication can be ordered through the author.

## The procedure or format of the process: key areas

First the career teachers/coordinators agreed on a **definition** of career development in school. We used the one in table 1.

**TABLE1: Definition of career development in a secondary school.**

“The inclusion in the curriculum of education, information and guidance and support to empower young people, now and in the future, to discover, concretise and realise their aspirations and opportunities in their life/career.”

Secondly, we asked practitioners to list their tasks in the last three months. Then we asked them to ‘arrange’ them into ‘families’. Finally we asked for the **key areas**: in what areas results are expected and for whom?

Two concepts were introduced here. A distinction between:

- management levels: in relation to the various activities carried out by the careers teacher and careers coordinator in terms of school management;
- direct and indirect time: to identify the key areas and overheads.

This was done in order to channel the thoughts and reactions to the questions that were being asked.

The classification resulting from the question ‘in what areas results are expected and who are the clients?’ virtually corresponded within six groups. On the right-hand side in table 2 is the list as given by one of the groups. On the left this list is reformulated into the six key areas for careers teachers and careers coordinators in secondary education.

**TABLE 2: Six key areas for career teachers/coordinators in secondary education.**

1. Career development at a strategic level	School management – develop strategy, vision and policy; – provide leadership
2. Career development at a structuring level	Staff involved – develop a plan and materials, choose methods; – assign roles and responsibilities
3. Career development at an operational level: guidance and support to fellow staff	Fellow staff – coaching of colleagues (tutors and teachers)
4. Career development at an operational level: guidance and support to students and parents	Students and parents – guidance and support to students and parents/guardians
5. Career development at an operational level: information broker	Students and parents – give information and advice, present to students and parents/guardians
6. Career development at an operational level: initiating and maintaining external contacts	External, community partners – maintain external contacts; – maintain community links

Every key area is divided in constituent areas, in turn divided into tasks and ultimately can be translated into a work-plan. The key areas therefore give an insight into what the careers teacher/coordinator does. An example of one is given in table 3.

**TABLE 3: Example of the constituent areas and tasks in this area.**

<b>Key area 1. Career development at a strategic level</b>	
Constituent areas in this key area	
1.1.	developing the career development activities in the school within the framework of the existing objectives and policy of the school in consultation with the school management.
1.2.	creating support for career development policy in consultation with the school management and middle management
1.3.	developing the coherence between career development with the rest of the curriculum.
Tasks within these constituent areas	
1.1.1.	outlining the career development activities, in the school prospectus for instance, on the basis of the identified needs of the students and staff in the school, the school's objectives and policy and legislation.
1.1.2.	determining the main principles of and priorities in the career development policy and the conditions for the effectuation (budget, formation, administrative support and training) of this policy in consultation with the school management.
1.1.3.	identifying new developments in career development and in education, within and outside the school, and adopting or adapting existing career development policy in consultation with the school management.
1.1.4.	evaluating the effects of the career development policy.
1.2.1.	informing and motivating the team about the main principles of career development policy in school.
1.2.2.	generating commitment in teachers and tutors in their role within career development.
1.3.1.	relating the work in career development to an effective development of responsible learning in the students.
1.3.2.	promoting <i>vocational orientation</i> (a specific subject in Dutch pre-vocational education) and setting up processes to link it in with the career development curriculum.

### **The procedure or format of the process: competencies**

Now we turned to the second question regarding competencies to fulfil the tasks in the key-areas. Competence is defined as “a mixture of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, which together determine whether someone is able to function effectively in a work situation”.

More than simply having learnt or knowing ‘something’, this is about being able to translate and apply it in a context.

We didn't analyse the key areas. The reason for that was that it was boring and we found that situations where ‘you have to be at your best as a professional’, are situations that consist of a mix of the key areas. So we took up agreed ‘critical professional situations’ and analysed these on three aspects:

- what do you need to know: knowledge?
- what must you be able to: skills?
- what are your personal qualities in this?

Knowledge and skills can be learnt, expanded, refined and sharpened: they evolve and overlap. Unlike skills and knowledge, personal qualities cannot be divided into different components and cannot be taught from outside. Personal qualities develop in a different way, often through situations —radical to a greater or lesser degree— that lead to a transformation or a fundamental change in approach. They can also be developed through in-service training, practice or coaching with an approach that strongly emphasizes personal qualities and for instance uses Bateson's model of personality layers.

We then asked participating career teachers/coordinators to 'translate' the knowledge, skills and personal qualities into competencies by means of an accepted assessment instrument. In table 4 you find the list they came up with.

### **The procedure or format of the process: behavioural criteria**

As a result of this part of the process the competencies have been translated in behavioural criteria, graded into three levels for assessment and self-evaluation reasons.

Many designations were considered to represent the three levels: beginner and pupil for the first grade or level. Advanced, proficient and journeyman for the second. And preceptor and tutor for the third. We finally opted for the names 'trainee', 'graduate' and 'master' in order to point to the developmental process involved, given that a professional has to/wants to/is able to learn. It was felt that the other alternatives did not convey this or inadequately conveyed it.

In table 5 an example how career teachers expressed the three levels.

### **How the instruments can be applied in a school?**

- The six key areas can be used as an instrument for dialogue within the school: with the school management, those in immediate managerial positions, fellow careers teachers/coordinators, tutors and/or teachers. What do they feel the careers teacher and careers coordinator is actually doing and what do they feel he or she should be doing?
- The competencies enables careers teachers/coordinators to determine their competence level for themselves, thus allowing them to determine their training/coaching needs more precisely. They can check their own assessment and needs with fellow staff if they wish.
- The overview with behavioural criteria can be used by the school management to screen aspiring careers teachers/coordinators for core qualities. School management can use it in performance interviews with careers teachers/coordinators and newcomers to career development to discuss the level he/she is at and so fine-tune a professional development plan with him/her.

Other applications can be realised outside of the school. Working with standards can lead to recognition of previously acquired skills as many Dutch career teachers/coordinators learn their trade by doing it. Recognition of these skills could lead basic training programmes to award exemptions, certificates or diplomas, which would mean that there is no lon-

**TABLE 4: Competencies of career teachers/coordinators in secondary education.**

1. Listening:	Showing you can pick up important information from verbal statements. Thorough questioning, responding to reactions.
2. Verbal presentation and fluency and clarity of verbal expression:	Presenting ideas and facts clearly using the appropriate means. Expressing ideas and opinions in clear spoken language.
3. Sensitivity:	Showing yourself aware of other people and what is going on around you and being aware of the influence you have on these. Behaviour that shows you recognize the feelings and needs of others.
4. Planning and organizing:	Effectively determining objectives and priorities and taking the necessary action and providing the necessary time and means for the set objectives to be achieved.
5. Problem analysis:	Registering/pointing out problems; recognizing important information; linking data. Tracing possible causes of problems; searching for relevant information.
6. Adaptability:	Remaining effective by adapting to changing environments, to tasks, responsibilities and/or people.
7. Integrity:	Working on the basis of generally accepted social and ethical standards in activities related to the job.
8. Resilience to stress:	Continuing to perform effectively under time pressure, in the face of adversity, disappointment or opposition. Two behavioural criteria that are important for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> line careers coordinators in particular:
9. Sensitivity towards the rest of the organization:	Recognizing the influence and consequences your decisions or activities have on the rest of the organization.
10. Delegating:	Clearly defining your decision-making powers and your responsibilities and managing your colleagues in this respect.

ger a need for a full training programme or course and specific training needs are more easily defined.

### **To be continued...**

The bottom-up procedure resulted in serious ownership of the standards among career teachers/coordinators in the Netherlands. A similar process is undertaken since, to support

**TABLE 5: Example of one competency set out in three levels.**

<p>1. Problem analysis:          Registering/pointing out problems; recognizing important information; linking data. Tracing possible causes of problems; searching for relevant information.  <i>Analysing problems</i>  <i>Note: this is applicable to more situations than just student guidance and support.</i></p> <p>trainee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feels unsure about the procedure;</li> <li>• subjective: his/her own perspective dominates;</li> <li>• recognizes parts of the problem;</li> <li>• takes no notice of body language;</li> <li>• guesses at the overall picture;</li> <li>• is able to formulate the problem with others;</li> <li>• draws up a plan of action with the help of others;</li> <li>• is able to tackle a simple problem.</li> </ul> <p>graduate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is able to use different procedures;</li> <li>• knows the most common problems of students in secondary education;</li> <li>• is aware of the interests of the different parties such as student, parents, school;</li> <li>• registers body language;</li> <li>• in interaction with the student: time, place and positioning of chairs are important;</li> <li>• formulates the problem independently;</li> <li>• is able to tackle several problems at the same time;</li> <li>• is able to deal with complex problems.</li> </ul> <p>master</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is able to leave the responsibility for a problem where it belongs;</li> <li>• responds to body language;</li> <li>• inquires about circumstances and is realistic about them;</li> <li>• works with the here and now;</li> <li>• is able to give cause and effect with the problem.</li> </ul>
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quality assurance of the career development activities itself on site-level. A ‘do you do this?’ method is developed with some 60 ‘pairs of a career teacher/coordinator and his/her school manager’. The purpose is to set up standards against which the career development activities to be evaluated can be compared, in a discussion that forces all involved to explicate what *they* are doing and *how*. Publication is expected in 2006.



## References

Plant, P. (2002). *Quality in Careers Guidance. A paper prepared for an OECD review of policies for information, guidance and counselling services. Commissioned jointly by the European Commission and the OECD.* November 2001.

**Fecha de recepción: 28-05-2004**

**Fecha de revisión: 16-09-2004**

**Fecha de aceptación: 05-11-2004**