

eGuidance in Denmark: A new initiative to help more persons into education

In January 2011 the Ministry of Education launched a new guidance service and established it as part of the Danish guidance portal www.ug.dk. Every person in Denmark who seeks information on education will get guidance from experienced counsellors via various communication channels (hotline, chat, email or sms) every day of the week.

eGuidance was designed to enforce and complement the existing offers within the Danish guidance system. It is a contribution to the Danish Government's overall target to encourage every young person to participate in education. The service provides easy access to independent information and guidance as to education and employment. Furthermore it offers guidance to citizens who seek assistance with their career management and competence development.

The service has been established for a period of two years and is currently being evaluated to assure that the targets are met and that the quality of the activities offered is high. Here you can read an interview with the manager of eGuidance, Mrs. Kirsten Hahn Larsen, about the first results after 10 months in action.

How is eGuidance organised in Denmark?

We are part of the Danish Ministry of Education and located in an agency called UNI-C. We have 37 employees out of which 12 work full time for eGuidance. Physically we are located in the offices of the Ministry of Education which is situated in the heart of Copenhagen at Slotsholmen next to the Danish Parliament and several other ministries.

Furthermore we have a large group of colleagues who work part-time for eGuidance. They are employed in other guidance units (Youth Guidance Centres,

Regional Guidance Centres or Job Centres) and work for eGuidance either 40% or 60 % of their time, which is about 2-3 work days per week. Like this we can maintain close communications and cooperation with the numerous guidance centres we have throughout Denmark. This is of course a management challenge but it provides an incredibly good synergy between the different ways of working. The part-time employees work in home offices.



Who are your target groups and how do they find you?

We provide guidance in education for everyone. The target groups can roughly be divided into:

- Young people in lower secondary schools who are about to choose a youth education after the 9th or 10th year of school;

- Adolescents in upper secondary education who will choose among higher education offers;
- Adults seeking continuing education and training or who wish to begin a youth education or a programme within the higher education system.

Popularly speaking, we provide guidance from cradle to grave. In other words, we offer a wide range of guidance opportunities. This makes our work really exciting and challenging since we have to cover a wide area of knowledge. To this end we make use of our general guidance competencies, and it is essential that we are all educated, skilled and experienced guidance counsellors; otherwise this would not be possible. It also requires a systematized structure of information search and a good system of knowledge sharing. Those who seek guidance find us through UG.dk but also via our new app. Besides, information about our offers is available in primary schools and in youth education institutions. We have provided more than 50.000 digital guidance sessions in the first 8 months.

What are your first experiences?

Now we know how eGuidance works. For instance chatting on the Internet is a relatively new tool within the guidance field. Almost 50% of our guidance sessions are via the chat, which has made us pretty experienced in guiding people this way. As a result we are now developing a methodology of guidance via the chat.

We have also realised that the chat is a unique guidance tool. It works on the terms of those who seek guidance. People can address us exactly when they want to and abandon the conversation if they do not wish to continue. Furthermore, the chat provides great opportunities for reflexion during the guidance session. We try to

gather the different experiences we made and communicate them to our partners through newsletters, articles and presentations at various conferences.

Were you inspired by other countries?

When setting up the eGuidance services in Denmark we have been inspired by other countries, i.e. Learn Direct in the UK and the experiences made in Sweden.

We have recently shared our experiences with the members of a working group within the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, and next year we will give a presentation to the Nordic Baltic Euroguidance Centres. We are very interested in exchanging experiences with colleagues in other countries who have established similar eGuidance systems.

Where do you see future challenges?

We are currently developing further channels of guidance. We have decided to try guidance via social media and have chosen Facebook for this project. This entails challenges and experiences, which are completely different from working with traditional channels.

As a digital guidance unit we must continuously think outside the box. We have to be innovative and develop new areas and channels of guidance, and it is both exciting and challenging to step into unknown territories.

Read more about eGuidance in Denmark, in Danish: www.ug.dk/evejledning.aspx; in English: <http://en.iu.dk/euroguidance>

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