

MEVOC Competence Standards for Career Guidance Counsellors

How did the standards develop?

After developing a first long version of the MEVOC quality standards, the partnership conducted an international Delphi expert survey in all project partner countries (Austria, Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Romania, Poland) to empirically evaluate the standards. 127 experts from the career guidance sector took part in the survey and answered a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire in writing. They were asked to indicate whether the individual quality standards were "absolutely necessary", "moderately necessary" or "not necessary" according to their experience. They were also asked to add standards that they felt were missing.

The results of the Delphi expert survey led to the decision to develop a "shortened" version of the standards, which only included the most important standards. The partners identified those standards that were considered "absolutely necessary" by at least 75% of all respondents and supplemented them with several others that had not reached the 75% mark but were considered by the MEVOC team of experts to be highly important in practice. These "reduced" MEVOC standards comprise four competence categories: "education and career", "consulting practice", "personality" and "ICT competences". They contain 12 standards, which in turn comprise 35 required competencies, as shown below.

The Standards

Competence Categories		Competence Standards	What does this standard mean and why is it important?
Education and Career	Education and training	Up-to-date knowledge of education and training facilities	It is a guidance counsellor's duty to update their knowledge in this field frequently as existing national and international education and training facilities change regularly. Counsellors should keep well informed by staying in contact with institutions, get regular information from relevant websites and newsletters as well as ministries. Clients have to be able to fully trust the counsellor that the information they receive is always current as it is difficult for clients to get an accurate overview on existing offers.
		Being able to identify clients' training needs for further professional development	It is important that counsellors have a broad overview over education and training offers on one side and over the skills and competence requirements of different jobs on the other. It is a counsellor's task to provide clients with this information

			<p>adapted to the needs of the individual. Only with a broad knowledge concerning offers and requirements can the counsellor actually identify a client's training needs and help the client with this knowledge. Clients themselves usually do not have this broad overview on labour market trends and have to fully trust the counsellor.</p>
		Being able to provide relevant information for specific fields of study/training	<p>It is important that counsellors have a broad overview over education and training offers on one side and over the skills and competence requirements of different jobs on the other. It is a counsellor's task to provide clients with the relevant information on what further training/education they need to fulfil their individual career plan. Clients themselves usually do not have this broad overview and have to trust the counsellor.</p>
	Labour Market Dynamics and Knowledge of Professions	Knowledge and active monitoring of labour market developments and trends and of relevant information sources in this field	<p>Counsellor need to keep themselves up to date with the current and future situation in the labour market. In order to be able to give accurate and relevant advice to clients, guidance counsellors must be in touch with the labour market both in its current and future states in order to facilitate matching of aspiration and demand.</p>
		Knowledge of occupations and its key actors, requirements, prospects and training opportunities of these occupations; having access to relevant information sources in this field	<p>Counsellors need to understand not only the professions that they give advice about but also the route/s that a person entering that profession needs to take in terms of skills, qualifications and timescale. This includes: Having a comprehensive picture of a job or profession, including the different steps on the career ladder that such a profession offers; an understanding of the roles, duties and opportunities that the profession offers; an understanding of the requirements of the profession in terms of abilities, skills and qualifications required; an understanding of the entry and qualification routes into that</p>

			profession.
		Knowledge of existing job opportunities and of relevant information sources for finding vacancies	Counsellors must know what is available and what different sources of opportunities exist in order to be able to direct clients to the most appropriate opportunities and/or information sources.
Counselling Practice	Communication with the client	Knowledge of general characteristics of different target groups and the skill to develop appropriate counselling strategies adapted to the characteristics of the target group	Counsellors will encounter different target groups in their work. These will be different in a variety of ways, for example gender, age, ethnicity, culture, ability, level of qualification etc. Diverse target groups require different guidance strategies in order to reach each group effectively. Counsellors need to be aware of the differences in each target group and of different counselling strategies in order to work most effectively with all their clients.
		Basic social skills and handling (difficult) target groups	Counselling is an interpersonal interactive process. The possession of basic and diverse social skills is essential in order to facilitate an empathetic exchange between counsellor and client, in which the client feels at ease. Basic social skills are skills such as listening, focus, body language etc, that are key to successful communication between individuals. They can be different with different target groups.
		Having the skills to identify clients in difficult situations which impede their career decision-making abilities (e.g. health, drugs, housing etc.) and being able to refer them to relevant specialists	Clients may present themselves to counsellors with a range of different problems which they may not recognise themselves. Counsellors need to have an ability to analyse the clients total situation as a client may have problems that need to be resolved before the guidance process can begin effectively. Counsellors do not need to be able to deal with all potential problems themselves, but should know the appropriate agencies and how to refer a client to those agencies for adequate help.
		Having the skills to promote individual initiative in taking	Counsellors need to be able to empower clients to be able and willing to make appropriate, informed decisions for themselves.

		responsibility for career management	Only if clients are self aware are they able to realise when they need help and are able to either make changes themselves or seek appropriate help.
	Coaching skills	Having the skills to express information and advice in a clear and understandable way	Different target groups or individuals have different levels of ability to deal with and interpret information sources. Counsellors need to be able to analyse their clients' needs and to mediate information for them so they are able to benefit from that information. They need to be able to interpret and present information in a way that is appropriate to the target group or individual being addressed.
		Having the skills to motivate clients	Without the clients acceptance of the outcomes the guidance process is ineffective. Therefore counsellors have to be able to make clients accepting of and positive about the results of the guidance process and empower them in taking action.
		Having the skills to help but also remain detached	Guidance is an empathetic process that requires an understanding of the client's situation and problems. Although effective guidance requires sympathy with the client's situation counsellors should not become emotionally involved with clients as this can affect the ability of counsellors to give unbiased advice. Counsellors also need to protect themselves from too much involvement at a personal level with clients problems in order to avoid burn out.
	Assessment	Interviewing skills	Both knowledge of questioning methods and interviewing techniques are basic skills in the guidance process. Counsellors need to be able to draw information from clients in order to facilitate the guidance process.
		Basic telephone communication and counselling skills	A good knowledge of paralinguistics (understanding of voice intonation) and communication principles is important as counsellors need to speak simply in order to give clients the feeling that they are understood

			<p>on a rational, emotional and social level. This is important in order to build up a productive relationship between counsellor and client and to motivate the client.</p>
		<p>Having the skills to analyse clients' needs</p>	<p>It is one of the counsellors most important competencies to be able to analyse a client's needs. Only on the basis of this analysis can counsellors advise clients. Counsellors need to be able to separate and differentiate their own emotional perception from their analytic ability in order to help clients in a rational and realistic way to facilitate self-awareness, find career solutions and make career decisions.</p>
		<p>Having the skills to identify a client's competencies for self-employment and entrepreneurship and being able to offer relevant information</p>	<p>Starting up one's own business is a way of making one's living that has many advantages like being flexible or being one's own boss. In the UK 12.6% of all jobholders are self-employed*.</p> <p>Counsellors need to be able to identify clients with strong competencies for self-employment and entrepreneurship and make them aware of the possibilities this offers them. Counsellors furthermore need to know and be able to provide relevant information about support programmes for young entrepreneurs.</p> <p>* Source: UK National Statistics Office Labour Force Survey April to June 2005</p>
		<p>Knowledge of what aptitude/skills tests and interest tests exist that are used in career counselling</p>	<p>Counsellors need to have a broad overview over the psychometric and behavioural tests that are currently applied in counselling. They should be able to choose the relevant tests to help clients to be clear about their abilities, strengths, weaknesses and to gain a deeper knowledge of themselves with regard to their education and career planning. However, counsellors must be aware of the limitations of tests and be able to interpret the results adequately – if needed under the oversight of a psychologist.</p>

		Having the skills to administer aptitude, skills and interest tests and to correctly interpret the results of those tests and to give appropriate advice based on those results	Counsellors need to have a broad overview over the psychometric and behavioural tests that are currently applied in counselling. They should be able to choose the relevant tests to help clients to be clear about their abilities, strengths, weaknesses and to gain a deeper knowledge of themselves with regard to their education and career planning. Counsellor must however be aware of the limitations of tests and be able to interpret the results adequately – if needed under the oversight of a psychologist.
	Job Matching and Placement	Knowledge of a client's opportunities on the labour market and being able to integrate this knowledge in the counselling process	Counsellors need to use their broad knowledge of existing job opportunities and the related skills/competence requirements in order to be able to match clients skills/competencies and needs to the current and future labour market opportunities. This is necessary to ensure that clients gain employment both in the short and long term. Consequently counsellors have to undergo regular updating of their knowledge in this field.
		Knowledge of formal and informal job application processes	Counsellors need to keep up to date with existing and evolving job application methods with regard to industry, regional particularities as well as legal and actual labour market needs and they need to be able to provide clients with this information adapted to their individual application procedure, job sector and personal background.
		Knowledge of how to filter job offers in accordance with a client's identified abilities and resources and being able to teach clients how to do so themselves	Counsellors have to be able to help clients recognise and interpret the required skills listed in job descriptions and, on the basis of this, match job vacancies to their own skills/competencies. Counsellors need to be able to transfer their knowledge about job matching to clients to help them in job searching.
	Ethics	Being aware of ethical standards and codes of	Counsellors should know about the existence of formal and informal

		conduct	(unspoken) codes of conduct and abide by them. They have to update their knowledge of ethical standards regularly (e.g. www.iaevg.org).
Personality	Personal Skills	Having the skills to sustain a positive and motivated attitude when dealing with difficult clients and situations	In order to be successful counsellors need to have an intrinsic will to provide an optimal service. "Optimal" means that the client's needs need to be identified and that the client needs to be provided with all required and necessary information and needs to be helped in whatever ways needed. Counselling can be a very demanding job that requires personnel that are able to cope well with high demands, stress and pressure and, to some extent, involvement in personal matters.
		Having the skills to think positively (also in less encouraging situations)	Some clients are in a rather negative mood and in a difficult situation as they face an insecure future not yet knowing what career path to choose. Counsellors need to be able to present options in a positive, enthusiastic yet realistic way to keep such clients motivated. Counsellors need to be keep a professional distance from their clients in order not to be drawn into a potentially negative mood.
		Not being afraid of new experiences or changes	As the skills/competence requirements of many (new) jobs change regularly and as clients come from a broad range of backgrounds with various needs and problems, vocational and career counselling is a job in which the counsellor has to be able to adapt to changes and new experiences. Counsellors also have to be willing to try new methods and tools. Counsellors should furthermore pay attention to organisational changes and developments in the larger environment and the labour market (EU-wide and international; e.g. European innovations like the EUROPASS CV – www.uknec.org.uk).
		Active listening skills	Active listening is more than just

			<p>being polite and empathic. It is an important skill for counsellors in order to be able to identify the client's specific needs and to respond to those needs.</p> <p>Additionally to listening to what clients say counsellors also need to be able to be sensitive to a client's non-verbal expressions (partly body language).</p>
		Being aware of clients' body language and able to manage own body language	<p>80% of the communication with another person is non-verbal, and part of this non-verbal communication is body language. Therefore counsellors have to be aware of how body language works and what its elements mean. They have to be able to use their own body language actively and adapted to the clients mood. A counsellor has to be able to read and understand the client's body language and respond to or at least consider a client's non-verbal expressions.</p>
		Being tolerant to and aware of cultural backgrounds and differences	<p>Counsellors deal with clients of many different cultural backgrounds including ethnical minorities. Therefore they should be aware of cultural differences not only to be able to adapt the counselling process to the cultural background of clients but also to prevent problems occurring between clients of different cultural backgrounds in group counselling (see EU-project "The impact of cultural differences in counselling" - http://www.impact-edu.org/).</p>
	Time Management	Management of activities: Being able to plan and manage activities	<p>Counsellors have to be able to plan and organise their own activities as well as stick to their time schedule not only in order to be able to meet all deadlines and work efficiently but also to be a good model to their clients. A counsellor who, for example, comes too late to an appointment with a client does not make a good impression and is not a good model.</p>
		Self-management: Being able to set priorities, focus on activities,	<p>In order to be able to work efficiently and with a focus on a client's needs counsellors need to</p>

		identify urgency and change the time table if necessary	be able to adapt their time schedules to urgencies and set priorities. They should be willing to accept feedback and team intervention.
	Stress and Frustration	Having the skills to cope with stress and frustration	<p>Counselling is a demanding profession in which counsellors provide a lot of support but seldom get anything in return. They often have to deal with clients who are not very motivated and regard their future as negative and insecure. Therefore they have to be able to cope with a lot of stress and frustration. They have to learn to maintain a professional distance from clients problems.</p> <p>Counsellors need a support network of other counsellors with whom they can discuss clients. They also need a support network of other professionals to whom they can refer clients with problems that fall outside their field of competence.</p>
	Further development	Being aware of one's own capacities and able to address or manage one's limitations	Counsellors should be sensitive to their own deficits for the task they face. They should be able to identify situations in which other specialists are needed and should refer clients to them. If they identify professional deficits that can be compensated they should (try to) do so.
		Being willing to attain life-long training	Counselling is a profession in which the information counsellors should have undergoes regular changes as a result of changing trends in different professions. Therefore counsellors should participate in research activities or should at least read research reports and publications from relevant fields. The motivation behind continuing training involves the personal goal of bridging the gap "between is and should" and "how to get there". Competition could be a stimulating factor.
ICT-Skills	ICT-usage and information management	Basic ICT skills (Word, Internet search engines, E-Mail)	Good information management means that counsellors learn and master ICT resources. The benefit is that clients data and information

			<p>about institutions are centralised, personalised and presented in a common format. Basic ICT skills are to be seen on www.ictskills.org. For more than basic ICT skills the counsellor can take continuing training (e.g. European Computer Driving Licence – www.ecdl.com).</p>
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