

# More Than Skills: Integrating Career Guidance and Well-being into the Core of VET Practice

The background of the slide features a silhouette of a wooden pier or bridge structure extending over a body of water. Several people are silhouetted against the bright orange and yellow sky of a sunset. On the left, a person is standing next to a bicycle. In the center, three people are sitting on the pier. On the right, two more people are standing. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

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# Agenda

- Why talk about career guidance in VET?
- What I talk about when I talk about career.
- Career guidance in VET: integrating epistemological learning and ontological formation
- Career guidance, well-being and social sustainability
- Discussion

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# Why talk about career guidance in VET?

- VET students are among those who receive the least career guidance – despite facing high demands in terms of decision-making and well-being.
- VET students often face challenges related to dropout, identity formation, and a sense of belonging.
- Career guidance is still too often regarded as add-on rather than as part of the core mission of VET.







# What I talk about when I talk about career.

# A classic notion of career

- understood hierarchically
- “career ladder”



# The challenge of "career"

'What do you want to be, when you grow up?'

*'An honest, brave and empathic human being!'*

'No... I mean, how do you want to sell your labour?'



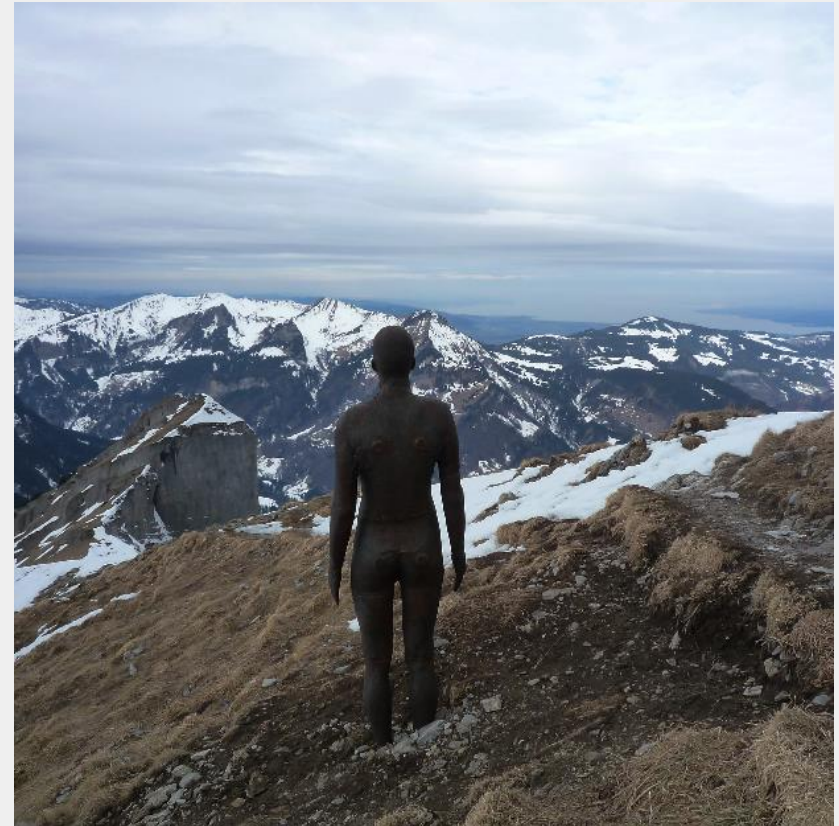


# Another notion of career

'Career' in career guidance or career learning is a horizontal concept.

'Career' is about the unfolding of life through learning and work, and how individuals navigate the relationship between personal aspirations, contextual opportunities, and societal expectations. (Watts 2014, Hooley, Sultana, Thomsen 2018, Klindt Poulsen 2023)

In that sense everybody has a career.



# Career as a journey or a competition? (Law&Stanbury,2009)





# 'Community-interaction-thinking'

- how the communities we are part of shape our learning and therefore our careers (Law, 2009).

- **Information** – How information about the world of work and especially legitimate options are shared in a social content.
- **Expectations** – This is based around what the social groups we are part of see as acceptable. Often we follow these influences in order to become acceptable to others.
- **Feedback** – This is what other people say about who we are. We either take on others views and use them to help understand ourselves or use what we see as negative aspects of this feedback to attempt to change who we are.
- **Modelling** – This is to do with following the example of others. We often, especially when we are growing up, pick other people as a desired goal for who want to be.
- **Support** – How community members may offer help and assistance to each other either through encouragement or through access to resources.

# Career guidance in this context

**Career guidance** should not be confined to information-giving or matching exercises. It is a relational, dialogical and reflective practice that enables people to make meaning of their lives, explore possible selves, and develop agency in relation to education and work.

**Career guidance** involves supporting people in exploring, imagining, and shaping a life through work, education, and societal participation.

Particularly relevant in VET: the vocational pathways students enter are often closely tied to identity, embodiment, and practice. Career guidance in this context can support not just transitions, but formation.



# Career guidance in VET: integrating epistemological learning and ontological formation

# Career guidance in VET

VET students often receive the least guidance, despite facing complex transitions and high risk of dropout (Psifidou et al. 2022, Zelloth 2014, Magee, Kuijpers & Runhaar 2022).

Career guidance is often marginalised in VET  
– seen as “already chosen”, therefore not needing further guidance (Magee, Kuijpers & Runhaar 2022, Cedefop 2020).

But career choice is not a one-time event  
– VET students need space to reflect on how to live with their profession, not just qualify for it (Klindt Poulsen & Skovhus 2023, Cedefop 2020).



# An ontological turn

Educating for an occupation/a vocation/a profession is not only about acquiring competences and skills; it is also about developing a professional identity. Students should not only be able to do something or become something — they must also become someone. (Dall’Alba, 2024; Glavind & Lang, forthcoming)

Vocational and professional education must foster both epistemological learning (knowledge, skills, and competences) and ontological formation (becoming and recognising oneself as a professional) (Dall’Alba, 2024; Glavind & Land, forthcoming).

# Career guidance as a bridge btw. epistemological and ontological

*"I don't know if I can see myself as a carpenter for the rest of my life... but I do like building things. Maybe I need to find something where I can still work with my hands, just in a different way."*

Here, career guidance is not about settling on a definitive choice, but about creating space for exploration, uncertainty, and connecting different ways of being in the world through work.

It is precisely in this process that career guidance becomes a bridge between the epistemological (being able to build, to master a craft) and the ontological (becoming a person in the world with a particular way of being).



# Career guidance as a shared professional responsibility in VET

Career guidance is not just for the counsellor's office – it must be shared by teachers and workplace trainers.

VET as a “career learning environment”: teachers create space for reflection, dialogue and exploration of possible future selves (Draaisma, Meijers & Kuijpers, 2015).

Everyday interactions – feedback, assignments, work placement conversations – can be powerful career guidance moments (Klindt Poulsen & Skovhus, 2023).

Effective career guidance is connecting subject learning with meaning-making and future orientation (Klindt Poulsen & Skovhus, 2023; Thomsen, Skovhus, Klindt Poulsen & Buhl, 2024).

# A whole-school and training approach

Careers guidance is both a whole-staff and a whole-institution endeavour (Gatsby Foundation, 2024).

Framing career guidance as a shared professional responsibility also points to its formative role for teachers and trainers themselves. By engaging in guidance as part of their everyday practice, educators are not only supporting students' development – they are also developing their own professional identities as educators who care, who listen, and who support vocational belonging.

## Career guidance as a pedagogical project.

# Integrated career guidance in VET

This is a pedagogical task, not only a task for the guidance counsellor in her office.

Not only an individual potential, but a collective potential.

Integration between career guidance and education does not mean that every teacher or trainer becomes a career counsellor. It means recognising that everyday pedagogical moments – in the workshop, in the classroom, at the worksite – can carry significant career guidance potential: Who am I becoming? And you? What matters to me? And to you? How does this work fit into my life? And into yours?

# Career guidance, well-being and social sustainability.



# Career guidance and well-being

"If a young man [sic!] chooses his vocation so that his best abilities and enthusiasms will be united with his daily work, he has laid the foundations of success and happiness... and if his occupation is merely a means of making a living, and the work he loves to do is side-tracked into the evening hours, or pushed out of his life altogether, he will only be a fraction of the man he ought to be."

(Parsons 1909, p. 10)



# Career guidance and well-being

Career guidance contributes to identity development and agency, especially in complex transitions (Guichard, 2005).

Career guidance supports well-being and engagement and reduces the risk of early leaving. (Robertson, 2013; Redekopp & Huston, 2019).

Career guidance improves well-being through both direct (counselling-like) and indirect (participation-enhancing) mechanisms (Robertson, 2013).

Students who feel seen and supported are more likely to persist and thrive in VET (Mann, Denis & Percy, 2020; Cedefop, 2021).

# Well-being as vocational belonging

***Vocational belonging.*** bringing together two interrelated constructs:

- Vocational identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011; Guichard, 2005).
- Sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

***Vocational belonging*** describes the way students not only identify with a vocational path but also feel that they matter in, are recognised by, and can find a place within the vocation they are training for.

# Career guidance can support vocational belonging

- **Connecting personal stories to vocational futures**
  - Through reflective dialogue and narrative practices, guidance helps students explore how their past experiences, values and identities can align with vocational roles.
- **Making space for uncertainty and multiple identities**
  - Career guidance can hold space for students who feel marginalised, uncertain, or mismatched in their current path, and thereby support inclusive learning environments.
- **Building bridges between students and vocational communities**
  - Career guidance can foster encounters with professional role models, peers, and practitioners, allowing students to see themselves as part of something bigger, and to imagine a future within it.

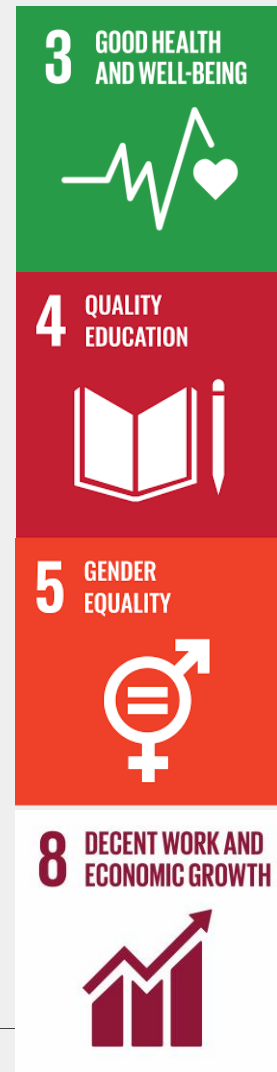


# Towards Socially Sustainable VET

Guidance and well-being are part of the social sustainability of VET systems. And career guidance and well-being are a common pedagogical responsibility – and a question of social sustainability.

VET must educate not only for skills, but for meaningful, situated, and dignified lives through work.

Vocational belonging, well-being and agency must be part of vocational education's mission.



# Towards Socially Sustainable VET

Career guidance can build bridges between personal life paths and professional futures in ways that support inclusion and participation.

As such, career guidance becomes a contribution to democratic education and equity, not just employment.

Supporting vocational belonging and well-being is key to socially sustainable VET, because education should not only train hands and minds, but also nurture people's capacity to live meaningful, situated, and dignified lives through their work.

# What does this mean for VET professionals?

Career guidance is pedagogical work – not just counselling.

All VET educators participate in shaping vocational belonging (and therefore well-being).

We must create learning environments that invite reflection, dialogue and dignity around what it means to live a life with and through one's vocation.

# What does this mean for VET research?

Important research agendas could be:

Exploring collaboration between teachers, workplace trainers and career guidance professionals: *Who guides – and how?*

Exploring how guidance contributes to reducing dropout and improving student well-being – not merely as individual support, but as an *integrated practice*.

Analysing the relationship between *career guidance, retention and vocational belonging*.



# Reimagining career guidance in VET

- 1. Career guidance and well-being are core educational responsibilities**  
They are not extras. Integrated into everyday teaching and training, they support students' sense of meaning, direction, and dignity.
- 2. Vocational belonging is central to persistence and thriving in VET**  
Students need to see themselves in their future work – not just as workers, but as whole persons. Career guidance can help them connect their personal stories with professional identities.
- 3. Career guidance is a shared task**  
Teachers, trainers, and guidance professionals must collaborate. A whole-school and whole-training-centred approach is needed to build inclusive and caring learning environments.
- 4. Career guidance builds a bridge between knowing and becoming**  
It links vocational knowledge and practice (epistemology) with the development of agency and identity (ontology). This dual role is crucial for socially sustainable VET.

Thanks for your attention!

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