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Checklists and Benchmarks–Valuable Tools for Enhanc-Ing Career Guidance at Schools? Systemic Overview and Presentation of the Guiding Schools Checklist

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Abstract

Context: Career guidance in schools is increasingly viewed as a strategic response to demographic changes, skills shortages, and digital transformation in the labour market. In Germany, schools face complex demands from educational policy, the Federal Employment Agency, and societal expectations, while still struggling to coordinate fragmented offerings into a coherent and effective guidance program. Although many initiatives exist, empirical evidence on their long-term efficacy remains limited, and the diversity of existing services complicates systematic evaluation. In this context, quality frameworks and checklists have emerged as promising tools to promote transparency, consistency, and school development in the area of career education.

Approach: The authors analyze a wide range of existing checklists and quality frameworks used in German-speaking countries and selected international contexts. The study compares the objectives, structures, and content dimensions of over a dozen tools, including the Gatsby Benchmarks, the Berufswahl-Siegel, and several regional initiatives. Based on this analysis, the Erasmus+ "Guiding Schools" project developed a new checklist rooted in the Career Management Skills (CMS) approach. This tool is designed as a reflective and formative instrument for schools, enabling them to self-assess and develop their vocational guidance programs across seven key dimensions.

Findings: The analysis reveals strong thematic overlaps between the checklists, especially regarding structural anchoring, cooperation with external partners, individualization, and the promotion of CMS. Yet there are also significant variations in their specificity, target audience, and integration into school development. The "Guiding Schools" checklist distinguishes itself through its comprehensiveness, its European orientation, and its explicit focus on disadvantaged youth, digital information literacy, and the physical integration of career services into the school environment. The checklist is not a scientific assessment tool, but rather a pedagogical

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framework to facilitate internal reflection, professionalization, and the alignment of guidance practices with educational goals.
Conclusion: Checklists and benchmarks can enhance the coherence and visibility of career guidance at schools and act as catalysts for professional discourse and school development. Their practical value lies not in rigid standardization but in their adaptability, comprehensibility, and capacity to support continuous improvement. However, their impact depends on local implementation conditions, such as staffing, infrastructure, and policy alignment. The authors call for further research into the use, perception, and effectiveness of such tools and recommend stronger international efforts particularly by the EU and OECD to develop shared quality standards for school-based career guidance.

Keywords

career orientation, checklists, career management skills, school development, quality framework

1 Introduction

A high level of awareness and expectation exists within the German economy, schools, and politics. In the face of technological progress, the digital transformation of work and a shortage of skilled labour, career orientation is seen as a key factor in securing economic performance.

The individual federal states have developed a systematic portfolio of services for career guidance. Parents and pupils also expect schools to adequately prepare pupils for the world of work and their future careers.

Schools find themselves in a tense situation, caught between the framework guidelines of the federal states, the compulsory offerings of the Federal Employment Agency and a wide range of other offerings for pupils from which they can choose. Despite a large number of individual studies and project evaluations, there is still relatively few reliable evidence of the effectiveness of certain interventions (Driesel-Lange & Klein, 2024). This is also due to the limited comparability of studies given the remarkably diverse nature of the services offered (Ohlemann, 2021). From an objective perspective, there is no shortage of offerings, but rather a requirement to coordinate them effectively for teaching purposes. At the same time, studies repeatedly show that even when they leave school, a significant proportion of students know little about their career options (Ohlendorf et al., 2025). When asked directly, students would like to see even more options, but above all ones that meet their specific needs (Giek & Seifried, 2023). Schools must therefore adhere to guidelines for career orientation while also selecting from a range of external offerings. Coordinating the several stakeholders and partners poses a specific challenge. Their interests vary to some extent, with trade, industry and the public sector competing with universities for qualified young people. This raises the question of the extent to which the labour market of the future will be taken into account in view of the current need for skilled workers. The effects of automation and digitalization is not recognized precisely (Anders et al., 2023).

An increasing number of schools are basing their career orientation program on a concept in which the individual modules are arranged according to year group and, on occasion, more or less intensively, interlinked with the subject lessons. For developing a concept are a number of guidelines available, e.g., from the Federal Employment Agency or the Bertelsmann Foun-

dation (Hammer et al., 2019). These contain the most important components that a career orientation concept should include. However, they do not clarify the latent objectives that the various stakeholders pursue with career orientation. Are certain occupational fields being targeted because there is particularly strong demand for labour in these areas? Or should information and decision-making competencies be strengthened so that young people are able to pursue their own career paths?

A significant cause of friction and inefficiency in school career guidance is seen in the fact that these sometimes-contradictory objectives and expectations are not sufficiently reflected upon and therefore not recognized (Benner et al., 2024, p. 179). To address this issue, the concepts of school career guidance should be based on an empirically sound quality framework. This will help to make objectives transparent and shape the concept for the benefit of young people.

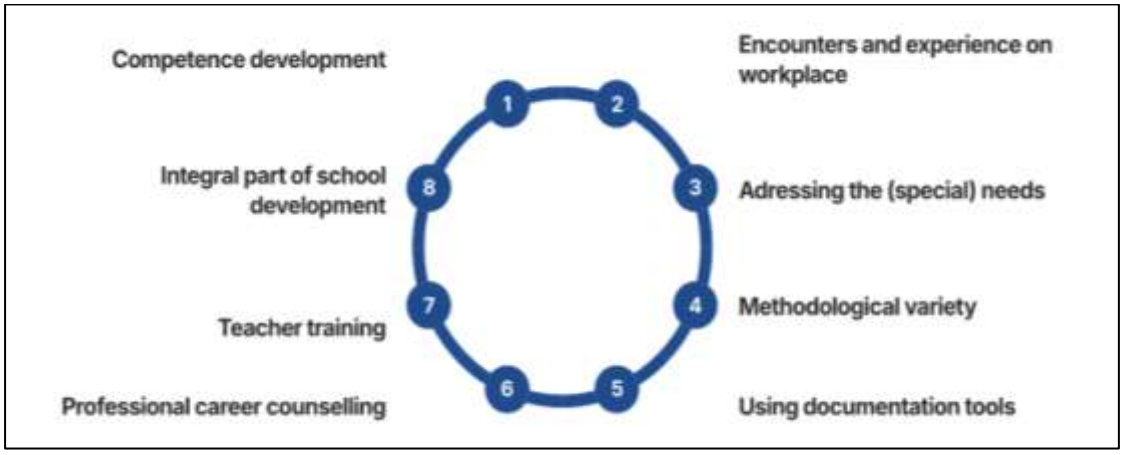
2 The Quality Framework

The Erasmus+ project ‘Guiding Schools’ has developed a quality framework for the design and evaluation of school-based career guidance concepts that focus on the development of students' skills (Figure 1). Based on blueprints from Career Management Skills (CMS), which are established in English-speaking countries for career guidance and career education in schools and universities, a conceptual framework is provided to describe the necessary skills. “These include skills that enable individuals and groups to gather, analyze and systematically link information about themselves and about education and training opportunities, as well as the ability to make decisions and cope with change and transitions” (Vuorinen & Watts, 2013, p. 23). The underlying assumption is that all other goals associated with career guidance – reducing the number of people without training or who drop out of education – can also be achieved by strengthening career choice and career management skills.

The use of a CMS model offers the advantage of shifting the focus away from the traditional German approach to career guidance in schools, which typically encourages students to make a single career choice at the end of their schooling, towards a lifelong development perspective. A decidedly emancipatory ethos also aims to provide greater support for disadvantaged pupils in order to broaden their career horizons and counteract structural mechanisms of disadvantage (Sultana, 2018). The competence framework presented below integrates the current state of scientific research on career guidance (Blaich et al., 2022).

The quality of career guidance is determined by the extent to which the competence dimensions listed in the Career Management Skills model are fully and appropriately weighted in the curriculum. Career guidance concepts include a wide range of learning opportunities for identifying, developing, and testing practical professional skills or career interests. The focus is on tailoring the program to individual interests and needs in a way that is sensitive to diversity. The use of documentation tools should be mandatory, and students should be supported in their use, e.g., of a portfolio. In addition to professional career advisors, teachers should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to support students in the process of choosing a career. They should also participate in the school development process, an essential aspect of which is shaping career guidance. To implement these quality criteria in a concept, there are a number of guidelines and administrative specifications in German-speaking countries. We would like to focus on checklists or benchmarks, which may also be a valuable tool for this followed by the design of a proprietary checklist.

Figure 1
Overview of Quality Framework



3 Analysis of Checklists

Checklists are useful tools with significant impact of the student's career readiness. So young people's career readiness is increasing, and they are more satisfied with career guidance. The risk of becoming NEET is reduced, and career decisions are less influenced by peers and media (Gatsby Foundation, 2024). These can be a learning and evaluation tool for developing innovative programs or reviewing and consolidation of existing ones.

The following section presents various checklists and criteria catalogues that can be used to assess and improve the quality of vocational orientation in schools. This overview is based on a search of publications in German-speaking countries and, in our opinion, includes all the most important current instruments. The checklists are presented based on the following aspects: Publisher, aim and target group, structure and assessment format, content dimensions and special features.

3.1 List of Criteria for the Career Choice Seal (Berufswahl-Siegel Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022)

The "Netzwerk Berufswahl-Siegel" (network vocational choice seal) is supported by "Netzwerk SchuleWirtschaft" (network school economy) and companies. The career choice seal is awarded based on the assessment of a school by a trained jury. Both the training of the jury and the further training of teachers take place at the Seal Academy. However, the list of criteria is used by the jury as a basis for the school's application and can therefore also be used indirectly for the school's self-assessment. The list of criteria comprises nine criteria: Building blocks for vocational orientation for students, action-oriented experience spaces, support for individual orientation processes, structural anchoring of vocational orientation in schools, further training of teachers, review of effectiveness and sustainability, involvement of extracurricular actors, involvement of parents/guardians, external presentation. Four aspects are particularly noteworthy compared to other checklists: The structural anchoring of the topic in the school, the focus on sustainability, the clear positioning to include extracurricular actors and parents and the networking concept. The external presentation is not just about awards, but above all about sharing good practice.

3.2 **Application Checklist for the Thuringian Career Choice Seal** (Bildungswerk der Thüringer Wirtschaft, n.d.)

The Thuringian Career Choice Seal is awarded by the "SchuleWirtschaft" (school economy) network in Thuringia. There is an online tool "Good career guidance" for school applications. Topics are systematically queried, which are to be assessed either with a checkbox (yes/no) or a scale (1= applies to some extent to 5= fully applies). There are also open questions and requests to provide (upload) documents or describe examples. Three subject areas are considered: Personnel and structural anchoring of vocational orientation, the level of young people and the school in the network. The anchoring is considered regarding an overall concept, resources and materials, integration with lessons and regular evaluations. The level of young people includes the provision of information, the promotion of career choice skills in the sense of the Thuringian Career Orientation Model (ThüBOM), practical offers beyond compulsory internships and documentation processes such as portfolios. In the area of school in the network, the focus is on systematic cooperation with partners (companies, educational institutions, PES, parents) and external presentation. Compared to other tools, the strong focus on the development of young people's career choice skills and the systematization of the modules is striking.

3.3 **Checklist for the Assessment of Career Guidance Offers** (SchuleWirtschaft Deutschland, 2025)

This checklist was developed in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (Public Employment Service/ PES), the "Netzwerk SchuleWirtschaft" (network school economy) and the Federation of German Employers' Associations (BDA). The checklist is aimed at individual teachers who would like to assess the quality of a vocational orientation offer from an external provider (especially company offers). There is also a variant for companies that want to check their own offerings themselves. Twelve criteria with 2 to 14 checkpoints each can be checked. These include: Practice-related self-reflection, design and action competence, decision-making competence, practical relevance, implementation competence (in relation to choice and application), information and media competence, promotion of key and future skills, target group specifics (especially in relation to diversity), organisational fit (effort/benefit, embedding in curriculum or BO concept, virtual formats), network integration, reference of the provider and sustainability (including in relation to certification for the portfolio). In comparison to the other checklists, the aim of this checklist is special; it is primarily concerned with the assessment of internship providers. In addition to aspects of career choice competence development, which can also be found in other lists, the combination of practical experience and reflection on the experience is the most decisive quality criterion here.

3.4 **Checklist for Cooperation Between Schools and Companies** (Ausbildungspakt Berufsorientierung, 2006)

As part of the pact for vocational education and training, the action guide "Schools and companies as partners" was developed in 2006 in a consortium of german business associations (BDA, DIHK, ZDH, BDI), ministries (BMWT, BMBF, BMAS, KMK) and the BA (public employment service), as well as many other partners. The BDA (Federation of German Employers' Associations) and the institute of german economy in Cologne oversaw the project. The guide contains several implementation checklists as tools: checklist for selecting cooperation partners (list of questions), checklist for defining structures and responsibilities (, checklist

for structuring a partnership with "cooperation etiquette". In addition, there is a matrix for evaluating the quality of one's own career guidance strategy . In this, various areas are to be assessed based on target quality, measure quality, result quality and ensuring sustainability. These areas are Strengthening of personality, social competence, and key qualifications; development of economic competence; orientation ability in career choice decisions; knowledge/experience with professional practice; strategy for lifelong learning. Compared to other tools, two aspects are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, the focus on cooperation between schools and companies and, secondly, the aspect of developing economic competence as part of career choice competence alongside other aspects of career choice competence.

3.5 **Checklist for a Career-Competent School** (ThILLM et al., 2010)

A self-assessment checklist for schools was developed based on the Thuringian Vocational Orientation Model (Türinger Berufsorientierungsmodell/ThüBOM). It lists different development tasks in which the school should classify itself as a beginner, advanced and expert. On this basis, goals and further strategies for development should be specifically defined (what, when, who, how, what with). A distinction is made between three main levels: school organisation, teaching, and personnel. The level of school organisation includes essential areas that are also mentioned in the seal checklists, such as overall concept, cooperation, public relations, resources, evaluation, and further development. In addition to these checklists, there is the requirement to integrate vocational orientation into everyday school life and cooperation with alumni. At the level of teaching, interdisciplinary and cross-grade measures are emphasized. Aspects of time (early start), relevance to action and the promotion of independence are also emphasized. The inclusion of diagnostics (e.g., in the assessment of career choice skills) is also not explicitly included in other questionnaires. At the last level of staff, the focus is on their competence requirements, which range from moderation and cooperation to professional and methodological qualifications in supporting young people in the career choice process.

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community in Belgium has published a framework plan for career guidance (Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgien & Förster, 2023), which is closely based on the Thuringian model.

3.6 **Practical Book on Learning on Site** (Lernen vor Ort Trier, 2012)

It is a handbook that was created by “Lernen vor Ort Trier” (learning on side Trier) in 2011 for the Ministry of Education, Science, Further Education and Culture in Rhineland-Palatinate. It represents a practical concretization of the guideline for school career guidance, career choice preparation and vocational orientation. The practical handbook contains a questionnaire for status analysis (pp. 66-71) with mostly open response fields, some with checkboxes (for partners, measures). This covers the following aspects of content: Vocational orientation measures, materials used in lessons, existing network partnerships, structures of school career guidance, existence of vocational orientation coordinator, overall vocational orientation concept, documentation of measures, concept for internship support, company contacts with target agreements, participation in competitions on economic and work-related topics, communication of vocational orientation information to the outside world, ideas for initiating projects/measures/contacts.

3.7 **Checklist for Successful Careers Guidance at Secondary Level l Schools** (Bundesagentur für Arbeit & Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SchuleWirtschaft, 2020)

The checklist was created by the Federal Employment Agency (PES) in cooperation with the "Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SchuleWirtschaft" (network school economy) in 2020. It contains questions with sub-questions for open evaluation and is now also available in digital form. Vocational guidance offers should be assessed on the basis of four criteria areas Content criteria (self-reflection; creative ability; gain in decision-making competence; information competence; social competence/personal competence; practical relevance; implementation competence; target group specifics; judge time/duration/appropriate effort), organisational and procedural criteria (network integration/networking), documentation of the vocational orientation (sustainability) and evaluation of the vocational orientation (reference of the provider, reflection on the evaluation result). Similar checklist could be found in Bavaria (Bayrisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus, 2023).

3.8 **Reference Framework for School and Professional Orientation** (Maison de l'Orientation, 2022)

The reference framework was created by the Maison de l'Orientation on behalf of the Luxembourg Ministry of Education. It relates strongly to career management skills (CMS). Pages 39-45 list quality criteria for the evaluation of the orientation concept. These are organized by topic and are to be assessed according to whether the concept has been implemented in accordance with the law and the CROSP (reference framework) or whether it is to be rated as advanced or excellent. The topics are: vocational orientation as a topic of culture, profile and development of the school; vocational orientation as part of quality assurance and development; awareness and further training of the members of an orientation unit; involvement of parents and students; involvement and further training and supervision of all teachers in relation to orientation; creation and publication of the vocational orientation concept including an overview of vocationally oriented curricular and extra-curricular activities; cooperation with external partners including evaluation of benefits; orientation of the learning objectives of measures to the competence areas of the CMS (this includes: Measures to develop decision-making skills, project planning skills and career skills); use of systematic development documentation (e.g. portfolio) and potential analysis tools; measures to get to know the world of work and different educational paths (especially in relation to lifelong learning). Particular attention is paid to the aspect of role and role change in the further training and supervision of teachers. There is also a special focus on both labour market trends and freedom from stereotypes when getting to know the world of work. In addition, it should be emphasized that there is a clear focus on CMS, especially against the backdrop of a labour market that will change significantly in the future.

3.9 **Checklist for Quality in Career Guidance** (Wirtschaftskammer Triol, n.d.)

The checklist for quality in career guidance was published by the Tyrol Chamber of Commerce. It contains a list of items (quality factors) that are to be evaluated according to whether they have already been implemented or not (the latter is formulated as: "Should we consider this?"). The list covers topics related to general guidance with a focus on the integration of career guidance into the curriculum at different grade levels, coordination, and documentation (e.g., in class registers and student workbooks). In addition, there are items dealing with practical work experience, including the format of work experience days and the organisational

framework for internships. Furthermore, the preparation and follow-up of explorations and visits are addressed, including company visits as well as visits to further education institutions, career information centers, and career fairs. Other items on the checklist include informing parents, application training, gender sensitivity, training and continuing education for teachers, and certification with a seal of approval. A final special aspect is the focus on reports from professionals, including former students, parents, and the local business community. In Austria a collection of material for career guidance could be found at the page of the federal ministry with a strong reference to career management skills (Bundesministerium Bildung, n.d.).

4 Conclusion of the Checklist Analysis

There are strong similarities between the checklists in terms of structure and topics. Vocational orientation is generally seen as a school-wide task that must be embedded in an overall concept of school development and curriculum. Most checklists promote the idea of action-oriented experience spaces, not only internships but all activities that allow practice contact. Many checklists share the goal of promoting career choice competences or career management skills as the main measure of success. Special attention is often paid to the fact that vocational orientation is an individual process that requires individual formats (such as counselling) and flexibility in the selection of instruments due to individual needs. The school cannot and should not offer these alone but is dependent on cooperation with partners. Some checklists focus primarily on the selection and design of cooperative relationships. Central coordination of the offers in the school (by a teacher or a steering committee), continuous further training of teachers and evaluation are seen as central to the sustainable implementation of concepts. Significant differences in the checklists can be found in the level of detail and in the justification of the criteria. They also differ in the extent to which the public presentation of the offers is addressed and the role attributed to the involvement of the PES career counselling service. Furthermore, the provision of information and infrastructure issues (e.g., counselling rooms, IT infrastructure) are not covered by all checklists. The same applies to the involvement in evaluation (review of effectiveness and sustainability) and documentation or the participation in a certification process. While contact with stakeholders in the economy is mentioned in the majority of checklists, only some mention the involvement of parents/guardians or alumni directly.

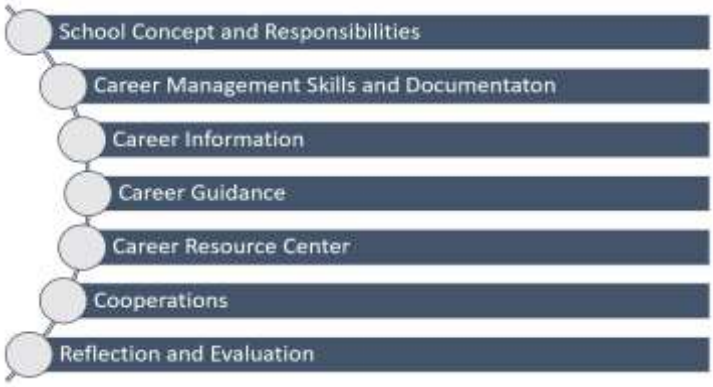
The checklists can help to understand vocational orientation as a central topic of school development. In our opinion, this is a significant added value to them. Which specific checklist is used is primarily a question of purpose. Is it about the (scientific) evaluation of an offer, is it about the concrete identification of possibilities for action, is it about didactic concepts or curricular embedding or is it about making best practices visible. The latter is a purpose that is strongly pursued through individual awards in the form of seals. This is useful for the visibility of the topic, but we consider it desirable to integrate the assessment of vocational orientation in schools more comprehensively and to make it an integral part of school evaluation and school development. This leads to the development of our checklist.

5 The Guiding Schools Checklist: Improving Quality of Career Guidance at Schools

The checklist was created as part of the Erasmus+-Project “Guiding Schools” by a project group in the “dvb” (german association of career counsellors) (Figure 2). It is aimed at school administrators and vocational orientation coordinators or teachers responsible for vocational orientation. The aim is to assess the degree of development of the vocational orientation at the school and to gain concrete ideas for further development. The checklist comprises seven areas,

each with a different number of questions, the answers to which are scored so that an overall score can be calculated. Feedback can be displayed for each question (especially if the highest score has not been achieved), which refers to the section in the associated handbook in which the ideas and aspects are discussed in more detail (Blaich et al, 2022). The tool is not specific to a federal state but is rather located in the European discussion on career management skills. The tool enables reflection by vocational orientation participants and can be carried out at schools without external jurors or audits.

Figure 2
Structure of the Guiding Schools Checklist



The first section outlines all the aspects that a careers guidance program should include, e.g. the various learning opportunities. It also defines the responsibilities in the school that are necessary for the effective implementation of the program at the school. The second section describes the career readiness competences that students should acquire. Pupils with special needs are explicitly addressed. In addition, reference is made to the need for pupils to have a documentation tool for their career guidance process, which should also be integrated into the subject lessons. Career information is not just about providing students with access to relevant and up-to-date information about the world of work and the labour market. We also focus on the pupils' information-seeking skills, which are to be promoted in the career guidance process. It is similarly about empowering teachers to competently guide and support students in their search for information and, for example, to reflect on the results of online self-assessments or other tests. The availability of personal counselling sessions is at the heart of career guidance. These should be mandatory and prepared for and followed up in lessons. Schools should also have a contact person for careers guidance who has professional counselling skills. This leads to the next point, in which it is recommended that there should be a career resource center in the school where the counsellor is available at certain times. Events and career counselling sessions may also take place here. Co-operation focuses on the selection of relevant co-operation partners for vocational orientation, including alumni and school social work. Finally, it is checked whether the career guidance program is continuously evaluated and further developed and to what extent all participating professionals can contribute their experiences and perspectives.

The checklist can be used as a learning tool. There are several possible answers for each section, which express in graded form the extent to which the specific school has implemented

this aspect. The answers are also given a percentage, so that at the end of each section a percentage score provides information on how well this area has been taken into account in the respective career guidance process. Short feedback statements on the individual questions justify the correct answer in each case and explain the relevance of this point in vocational orientation. This provides a better understanding of the various dimensions of vocational orientation. Our checklist can therefore be used both for the development of concepts and for the evaluation of existing career guidance programs.

The following aspects can be highlighted as particularly important: Firstly, the focus on considering the needs of underperforming, mentally stressed or socially disadvantaged pupils. We are not pointing out how to meet these needs, but we emphasize that this is a very integral part of the concept and that those responsible for each school need to find out how to reach this particular group of students effectively. Secondly, the reference to research skills and assessment skills of diagnostic tools such as OSAs (Online Self Assessments). It is normally assumed that students can independently find relevant career information on the Internet or carry out career choice tests. However, research shows that for many young people, the ability to use the internet for education and their individual development is very limited. In Germany, 15% of 14–15-year-olds remain below competence level 1; they also need partial support with simple Internet applications. A range of 26% reach Level 1, i.e., they can search for information on the Internet at a basic level, with limited ability to assess its reliability and usefulness for current needs (Fraillon et al., 2024). This is a factor that is also strongly influenced by the social background of the pupils. This means that socially disadvantaged pupils in particular require competent support. And thirdly, the requirement to anchor vocational orientation with the help of a physical space in the school.

Compared to the checklists explained in the previous section, ours is considerably more detailed. It attempts to cover all relevant aspects of a career guidance program without reducing them to a list of essential core points. It therefore exceeds the Gatsby benchmarks, which focus in particular on work-related learning opportunities for pupils (Gatsby Foundation, 2024). The results of a systemic review of vocational orientation programs in latin america confirms the competence-orientated approach to career guidance (García-Botero et al., 2022). The focus there is on particularly important competence dimensions such as decision-making skills and self-knowledge, which students should be encouraged and supported in developing. In common with these two approaches, we emphasize the crucial importance of the personal support and guidance provided to pupils by professional careers advisors. This contributes significantly to the success of careers guidance programs and is not equally emphasized by all the checklists explained.

6 Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that certain checklists are designed to facilitate the development of programs and the generation of ideas. And they are utilized for the purpose of evaluating external measures and partners. This ensures that a minimum level of quality is maintained. Summarizing the current state of research, Checklists could be used to facilitate the process of certification, thereby serving to make evident the actions that have been undertaken. Some checklists attempt to translate scientific criteria of quality into assessable standards. The Guiding-School-Checklist is not a scientific measuring instrument, but rather an educational tool - facilitating the science-practice dialog. Their added value is not shown by whether they are scientifically accurate, but by whether they are understood by practitioners and help to support

school development in the area of vocational orientation. To date, there has been little research into how teachers actually use such checklists and whether certification processes such as seals offer long-term benefits in this area. Unfortunately, this significant gap also applies to our checklist, which was developed in collaboration with practitioners but has not yet been evaluated in terms of its use and impact in schools.

Having described the practical uses of Checklist, we would like to conclude by discussing the obstacles to its implementation. First, the scope for schools to design their own career guidance program varies greatly in Germany. Probably there a typical difference between Secondary and Grammar school. Orientation to higher education and subjects at universities will rarely be found at secondary schools. The fact that vocational orientation is seen here as a lifelong process, in which pupils can acquire the Baccalaureate at a later point and begin a university course, is not self-evident. Our checklist is currently addressed to all secondary schools, including grammar schools. It may be more useful, if it is adapted to the specific profiles of the various secondary school types to meet the specific conditions and needs pupils have. This applies in particular to the social composition of the student body. Schools with many children from immigrant families or many socially disadvantaged children also face particular challenges when it comes to organizing career guidance. Adolescents from disadvantaged social backgrounds are more likely to avoid the challenge of choosing a career and are also less likely to ask for guidance and specific support (Schleer & Calmbach, 2022). In order to reach such students, is it sufficient to use the checklist itself, as suggested by studies on the Gatsby Foundation benchmarks? Or should additional modules be included here that address special needs more specifically?

Second, the personnel situation, the material resources and also the relevance of the topic of career orientation varies greatly from school to school. Are the available resources sufficient to meet the benchmarks? Our checklist is designed as a learning tool to help teachers understand the complexity of career development and vocational guidance, and to contribute to the conceptual design of a career guidance program. This can lead to established structures and forms of cooperation having to change, with added resources being mobilized and new partners being found. The key point is whether there is a specific person responsible for career guidance at a school to manage all these issues.

A major topic is options for action at the school level. Not all areas can be decided on or implemented at the individual school level. School boards, local authorities and ministries had to be involved. And there is a constant change of objectives and focus on the political level. What is required is a commitment to the objectives of the benchmarks; this also applies to the external co-operation partners in vocational orientation. They would have to adjust their own targets in career orientation in line with the benchmarks. At the political level, there has to be an understanding that good career guidance can only be implemented if the required resources are provided.

In the Erasmus+ Guiding Schools project, it was evident that careers guidance at schools in the participating countries is organized and elaborated very differently in certain cases. In some countries, it already has a long tradition, while other countries are only just beginning to implement and professionalize it. The most recent OECD report on career readiness for pupils aged 15-16 also shows that career guidance programs are very differently structured internationally in terms of the activities and learning opportunities they contain. However, the challenges are more similar: „…students' job expectations have changed little and remain misaligned with actual labour market demands. Many young people continue to aspire to a limited

number of traditional, high-status jobs. Students' career expectations are increasingly concentrated in professional occupations, which do not align with the actual distribution of jobs in the labour market. Confusion about how the education system can be used to access desirable jobs is particularly pronounced among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many students demonstrate anxiety about their career prospects" (OECD, 2025, p. 5). In light of this, consideration should be given to whether the efforts of the EU or OECD should be intensified to develop and implement internationally comparable standards for careers guidance in schools. In the Guiding Schools project, a similar checklist for improving careers guidance in schools was developed in each participating country. The next step might be to fund scientific studies to investigate the extent to which this can actually improve careers guidance. This also provides an opportunity to establish the extent to which country-specific circumstances must be considered.

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