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# **EUROPEAN COMPETENCE STANDARDS FOR THE ACADEMIC TRAINING OF CAREER PROFESSIONALS**

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**First Edition, May 2015  
Short Version**



NETWORK FOR INNOVATION IN  
CAREER GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING IN EUROPE

**NICE articulates the need for European Competence Standards for the qualification of three types of actors engaged in career guidance and counselling (CGC):**

- 1. Career Advisors<sup>1</sup>** are important sources of basic information and support for people facing career-related challenges. Career Advisors are teachers, placement managers, psychologists, social workers or public administrators (among others). They are not career professionals, but professionals in another field, who offer some career support in addition to their main tasks and functions. Often they are the first persons to whom people come for advice. They should be able to offer basic support and advice at a reliable level of quality and immediately understand when a person would benefit from professional career services, which is why we also define competence standards for them.
- 2. CGC Practitioners** are career professionals, e.g. career counsellors, employment counsellors, career coaches, school counsellors, personnel developers, educational or guidance counsellors (among others). They are dedicated to CGC and see it as their vocation to support people in dealing with complex career-related challenges. In addition to the basic support offered by Career Advisors, CGC Practitioners need to be ready to support people who are facing uncertainty, multi-faceted problems and unpredictable situations, knowing that their career decisions could have a heavy impact on their lives. They support the development of strategic approaches, offer access to highly specialized knowledge, and help clients in facing stressful phases of transition and projects of personal change.
- 3. CGC Specialists** are career professionals, who take on a larger responsibility for the career profession and work towards the advancement of CGC in different ways. Some of them concentrate on practical matters, e.g. the management of career services, policy-making or the supervision of other career professionals. Others primarily engage in research and development or academic training in CGC. In addition to their ability to practice as CGC Practitioners, CGC Specialists need to demonstrate substantial authority, scholarly and professional integrity in a particular area of career guidance and

counselling.

**All three types of actors are of particular importance for quality assurance in the provision of lifelong guidance and counselling,** whether they offer career support in addition to their primary occupation in another field (Career Advisors), or as full career professionals (CGC Practitioners and Specialists). From the perspective of NICE, increasingly high levels of competence are necessary for people to fulfil the professional functions and tasks of these three groups. For this reason, NICE formulates competence standards at these three consecutive levels of practice in career guidance and counselling.

**NICE stresses the need for each of these groups to engage in specialized academic training as an entry requirement for their type of practice in career guidance and counselling.** Due to the high level of autonomy and responsibility required for the practice of each of these three groups, demonstrated by the complexity of their tasks and functions, NICE also pronounces their need to engage in continuous professional development and lifelong learning. Reflected practice should be a prerequisite of training and certification for professionals of each group.

**For the academic training and recognition of prior learning of Career Advisor competences, NICE recommends reference to Level 6 or 7 of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).** Academic training could be as part of, or offered in addition to Undergraduate or Postgraduate certificates and degree programmes in diverse disciplines. It should also be accessible for people in vocational leadership positions, but should not be awarded at a lower level than EQF 5.

**For the academic training and recognition of prior learning of CGC Practitioner competences, NICE recommends full degree programmes at EQF Level 7,** for instance specialized Master degrees or Postgraduate Diplomas. At the lowest, academic training should be offered in terms of specialized Bachelor programmes (EQF 6).

**For the academic training and recognition of prior learning of CGC Specialist competences, NICE recommends reference to EQF Level 8,** e.g. as part of structured doctoral training. At the lowest, training should be provided in terms of specialized Postgraduate certificates or Master Degrees (EQF 7).

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of translation, NICE recommends an adaptation of terminology to the local language and context (instead of literal translation), especially relating to the terms Career Advisor, CGC Practitioner and CGC Specialist.

## THE EUROPEAN COMPETENCE STANDARDS FOR THE ACADEMIC TRAINING OF CAREER PROFESSIONALS

	<b>GENERIC PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>CAREER COUNSELLING COMPETENCES</b>	<b>CAREER EDUCATION COMPETENCES</b>
<b>CAREER ADVISORS<sup>3</sup></b>	<p>1. Assess potential benefits of career services for individuals, communities and organizations to better deal with existing and emerging challenges</p>	<p>1. Produce a confidential, respectful and supportive environment for clients to speak openly about their career-related concerns and questions</p> <p>2. Confirm the type of career-related challenge a client is facing, based on active listening to concerns and questions voiced by client</p>	<p>1. Explain how to prepare applications for jobs and training opportunities (CVs, letters, interviews) to the level of general standards</p> <p>2. Explain how to learn about educational and occupational options and requirements, with reference to available resources for the specific target group</p>
<b>CGC PRACTITIONERS<sup>4</sup></b>	<p>1. Produce a case study of a professional interaction with a client, reviewing the client's needs, the process of professional support and their own behaviour on the basis of professional and ethical standards for career guidance and counselling and related theories</p> <p>2. Develop strategies to overcome personal role and value conflicts while working with clients from different backgrounds, in alignment with professional and ethical standards for career guidance and counselling</p>	<p>1. Conclude a client's main reason for seeking support in an empathic and respectful way, based on a client-centred interview</p> <p>2. Formulate an offer for a counselling agreement with a client, specifying objectives and approaches that suit the client's priorities and resources</p> <p>3. Explore which psychological and external resources are available to support the client to cope with phases of stress and achieving personal growth</p> <p>4. Assess the meaning of complex life situations and different types of information together with clients, based on their interests, competences and other resources</p> <p>5. Apply suitable models for creative problem-solving, decision-making and strategic planning, based on the interests and preferences of clients, as well as their resources</p>	<p>1. Assess the career management competences and learning needs together with clients, applying appropriate instruments and approaches</p> <p>2. Design career education sessions, combining educational contents and methods to support members of a particular target group, with flexibility to respond to their specific learning needs and behaviours in the process</p>
<b>CGC SPECIALISTS<sup>5</sup></b>	<p>1. Provide academic training to reach learning outcomes according to international and national quality standards to assure the competence of career advisors and career professionals</p> <p>2. Conduct original research and develop fundamental theories on career-related topics to inform evidence-based practice, rigorously applying scientific standards and principles of good communication</p> <p>3. Justify the value of interdisciplinary research and training in the field of CGC based on the findings of various academic disciplines and empirical knowledge on the particular challenges of career services</p>	<p>1. Design career counselling approaches and instruments to support target groups with specific needs in solving their career-related problems, responding to verified needs in practice</p> <p>2. Review the practice of CGC practitioners and career advisors for the development of their competence and professional self-awareness in a collaborative way, paying particular attention to intercultural and ethical aspect</p>	<p>1. Develop methodologies for measuring people's career management competences for particular target groups, based on scientific evidence and methodology and verified needs from practice</p> <p>2. Develop strategies, curricula and training programmes for improving the career management competences of a specific target group based on actual needs of the target group and relevant quality standards</p>

<sup>2</sup> NICE distinguishes between five professional roles, which together define the scope of the career guidance and counselling practice (see NICE Handbook 2015). The systemization of the European Competence Standards (ECS) follows the five roles. The generic professional competences hold the other competences together as meta-competences and are relevant for the practice of all roles.

<sup>3</sup> Career Advisors should be able to demonstrate all competences defined for the Career Advisor level.

<sup>4</sup> CGC Practitioners should be able to demonstrate all competences defined for the Career Advisor level and the CGC Practitioner level.

<sup>5</sup> CGC Specialists should be able to demonstrate all competences defined for the Career Advisor and CGC Practitioner level, as well as all generic professional competences at the CGC Specialist level and the competences of one or more professional roles at CGC Specialist level.

## THE EUROPEAN COMPETENCE STANDARDS FOR THE ACADEMIC TRAINING OF CAREER PROFESSIONALS

CAREER ASSESSMENT AND INFORMATION COMPETENCES	CAREER SERVICE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCES	SOCIAL SYSTEMS INTERVENTION COMPETENCES	
<p>1. Identify websites, self-assessment tools and other sources which provide career information for the particular target group of the client, responding to the explicit interests, abilities, skills, competences and needs they have formulated<sup>6</sup></p>	<p>1. Report on the quality of career services based on specific quality criteria and standards for career guidance and counselling</p>	<p>1. Arrange a voluntary meeting of a client with a placement-provider, relating to the needs formulated by the client</p> <p>2. Judge when to make a referral to a CGC practitioner or to another professional service, based on assessment of one's own ability to provide the support needed by a client</p>	<b>CAREER ADVISORS</b>
<p>1. Assess informational needs of clients, regarding their interests and competences, the relevant labour market, and features of vocational and educational systems, to confront informational problems such as information overflow, stereotypes, disinformation, and lack of information<sup>7</sup></p> <p>2. Select scientifically validated methods and tools for self-assessment, as well as information sources to satisfy the clients informational needs</p> <p>3. Assess particular resources, interests or other relevant characteristics of an individual client using a suitable career assessment approach of high validity in a collaborative way, to provide the client with personally relevant information</p>	<p>1. Construct appropriate communication channels, language and arguments to attract members of a particular target group to a particular career service offer</p> <p>2. Implement career services strategically in cooperation with other relevant actors to reach relevant target groups</p> <p>3. Produce good professional relations with clients, colleagues and organisations to ensure quality of career services</p> <p>4. Review career services and their organisation on the basis of quality standards for career guidance and counselling and the needs of their specific target groups, and propose viable approaches for service enhancement, based on such an analysis</p>	<p>1. Identify common interests between the perspectives of different stakeholders in supporting a particular target group (e.g. early school leavers), to propose how relevant cooperation structures could be built up and maintained (networking)</p> <p>2. Justify a need for support and propose a strategy in the case of an individual client in dealing with relevant stakeholders (e.g. parents, employers, public institutions) for the sake of the client's career development</p> <p>3. Devise recommendations on how to overcome a career-related conflict, based on a fair evaluation of the interests of all involved parties</p>	<b>CGC PRACTITIONERS</b>
<p>1. Design career assessment approaches and tools (tests, questionnaires, scales etc.), to provide a relevant and reliable diagnosis of people's career related interests, abilities, competences, motivations and other characteristics</p> <p>2. Design career information systems to systemize relevant information on specific labour markets, education and training systems, and to anticipate emerging trends and issues, to suit the search patterns and interest of relevant target groups</p>	<p>1. Evaluate the quality of techniques and program evaluation models used in career services, applying standards and expertise on innovative and effective practices</p> <p>2. Appraise human resources of career services applying appropriate management approaches to ensure the quality and sustainability of career services provided, also in relation to funding</p> <p>3. Implement a quality assurance and development system to secure relevant quality standards and improve the quality of services in a collaborative way with other stakeholders</p>	<p>1. Design concepts for more inclusive and effective social systems and their implementation in collaboration with employers, policy-makers and other stakeholders, based on an evaluation of the systems' ability to foster social justice, employment and the well-being of communities, organisations and individuals</p> <p>2. Design policies and strategies the inter-sectorial and interdisciplinary coordination in cooperation with relevant stakeholders at regional, national or international level</p>	<b>CGC SPECIALISTS</b>

<sup>6</sup> For guidance, how to interpret the European Competence Standards (ECS), please consult NICE Handbook Volume II (2015): European Competence Standards for the Academic Training of Career Professionals.

<sup>7</sup> The ECS concentrate on the domain of competence; hence, there are no explicit references to areas of knowledge, professional values and attitudes or skills. Implicitly, the ECS demand a strong multi-disciplinary knowledge basis, including knowledge on individuals, groups, organisations, communication, diversity, politics and markets, as well as a strong professional ethic and a multitude of skills.

## THE EUROPEAN COMPETENCE STANDARDS FOR THE ACADEMIC TRAINING OF CAREER PROFESSIONALS

### What are the ECS and what are their benefits?

The objective of the European Competence Standards (ECS) is to create a common reference framework, which promotes excellence and quality development in the academic training and certification of career professionals and career advisors within the European Higher Education Area. As a translation device, they shall also improve the transparency, comparability and validity of relevant qualifications awarded in the different European countries.

Their implementation will promote the continuous professional development of career professionals and career advisors, increase the recognition of their competences both nationally and internationally, and support the quality assurance of training, further education and certification related to career guidance and counselling (CGC).

### Who shall work with the ECS? What should users be doing with the ECS?

The ECS are a voluntary framework, so there are no formal legal obligations for their introduction.

The primary users of the ECS will be higher education institutions, which offer qualifications in career guidance and counselling. 2018 is the recommended target date higher education institutions offering study programmes in career guidance and counselling to relate their degree programmes to the ECS.

The ECS do not replace national qualification standards and benchmarks for career guidance and counselling. To enhance links and transparency in Europe, NICE calls on bodies in charge of national qualification frameworks for career professionals and career advisors, as well as relevant professional associations, to relate their standards and benchmarks to the ECS and to participate in the future development of the ECS.

### How do the ECS relate to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area?

Due to the high competence requirements associated to career guidance and counselling, the ECS only relate to the academic qualification levels. Short-cycle higher education offers (within or linked to the first cycle), corresponding to EQF Level 5, should only be offered for the training of Career Advisors. CGC Practitioners should at least train for practice through a full first-cycle programme (EQF 6), preferably through a second cycle programme (EQF 7). CGC Specialist training should only be offered in terms of second or third cycle training (EQF 7 or 8). No full cycle programmes should be offered for the training of Career Advisors.

### Why do the ECS refer to competences?

Competences provide measurable descriptions, of what a person holding a particular qualification should be able to do. By relating directly to the needs of citizens, clients and employers, competences support a better match between teaching, learning and assessment and labour market needs. For more information on the application of the ECS, please consult the NICE Handbook from 2015.

The ECS do not define learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, values, attitudes or skills. The translation of competences into these more concrete types of learning outcomes is a creative process, for which NICE offers suggestions via the NICE Curriculum Framework (see NICE Handbook from 2012).

### Who does NICE represent in introducing the ECS?

NICE represents more than 40 higher education institutions offering degree programmes and promoting academic training in career guidance and counselling from 29 European countries, who have been working together since 2009 with financial support from the European Commission. This publication only reflects the views of NICE. The European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

### Does NICE award qualifications?

No, the ECS form a sectorial qualification framework for qualifications in career guidance and counselling, which is promoted by NICE and relates to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The awarding of qualifications remains a matter of national qualification bodies.

### Does NICE aim at standardizing academic training in career guidance and counselling?

No. With the ECS, NICE proposes a consensus of minimal requirements for the competence of career professionals and career advisors around Europe. NICE respects the autonomy of higher education systems and institutions, and promotes the diversity of degree programmes. The ECS are meant to be common reference points for the development of academic training in career guidance and counselling, which shall be interpreted and adapted according to specific needs.

### Which rights does NICE reserve concerning the ECS?

NICE reserves the rights to actualize the ECS regularly and publish translations. The use of the ECS for purposes of accreditation, training and certification is welcome, provided the source is acknowledged. For more information, please visit [www.nice-network.eu](http://www.nice-network.eu)

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The development of the European Competence Standards for the Academic Training of Career Professionals has been co-funded by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Community, which cannot be held responsible for any of the information presented here.

Edited by Johannes Katsarov, Jukka Lerkkanen, Jacques Pouyaud, and Kestutis Pukelis

Contributors (in alphabetical order): Graham Allan, Salim Atay, Toni Babarovic, Mihaela Badea, Stella Blöndal, Randi Boelskifte Skovhus, Baiba Briede, Cristina Ceinos, Anne Chant, Banu Cirakoglu, Valérie Cohen-Scali, Petya Dankova, Jean-Pierre Dauwalder, Nikos Drosos, Maria Eduarda Duarte, Sif Einarsdóttir, Bernd-Joachim Ertelt, Elena Fernández, Lea Ferrari, Zuzana Freibergová, Andreas Frey, Rebeca García, Laura Gressnerová, Erik Hagaseth Haug, Lucy Hearne, Lenka Hloušková, Johannes Katsarov, Jaana Kettunen, István Kiss, Andrej Kohont, Alain Kokosowski, Seija Koskela, Jolanta Kavale, Monika Kukyte, Christine Lagabrielle, Jukka Lerkkanen, Mia Lindberg, Anders Lovén, Ande Magus, Koorosh Massoudi, Dione Mifsud, Janet Moffett, Rachel Mulvey, Lijana Navickiene, Sasa Niklanovic, Helle Nordentoft, Laura Nota, Czesław Noworol, Hazel Reid, Janis Pavulens, Monika Petermandl, Roberta Piazza, Peter Plant, Jacques Pouyaud, Ivan Prelovský, Nathalie Prudhomme, Kestutis Pukelis, Sauli Puukari, Margit Rammo, Jérôme Rossier, Jean-Jacques Ruppert, Christiane Schiersmann, Nicolas Schöpf, Torild Schulstok, Teresa Sgaramella, Despoina Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, Grzegorz Sikorski, Luis Sobrado, Inita Soika, Salvatore Soresi, Emil Stan, Tim Theeboom, Rie Thomsen, Štefan Vendel, Inge Van Der Putten, Annelies Van Vianen, Guðbjörg Vilhjálmisdóttir, Raimo Vuorinen, Peter C. Weber, Frida Wikstrand, Jan Woldendorp, Julia Yates, and Anda Zvigule.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who shared their comments and ideas with us during the European Summit for Developing the Career Workforce of the Future in Canterbury (September 2014) and who participated in the public consultation on the first draft of the European Competence Standards from September to November 2014!

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