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TRANSFORMING CAREER GUIDANCE

A deep dive into the creation of a Master of Science (MSc) programme “Career Studies”

The main objective of a career guidance system is to empower young people to choose their studies with full knowledge of the skills and competencies that are expected by employers in their countries. By contributing to matching skills and jobs, professional career guidance increases their chances of employment. This is particularly true for students engaged in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), as it is often a path of studies chosen by Mongolian young people who might have less knowledge of and familiarity with the changes occurring in the labour market and employers' demand.

Despite being so important for students to navigate their professional paths, career guidance was not optimally delivered in Mongolia.

“As a country with active labour market policies, Mongolia provides career guidance counselling and job matching services through the public employment structures. However, these services are not always well aligned with labour market demand and information. Moreover, there has been a lack of systematic, coordinated and efficient approaches to capacity building and training for the civil servants responsible for career guidance counselling.” Zayasaikhan Dugeree, Senior National Programme Officer, SDC Mongolia.

Improving the capacity of career guidance counsellors to respond to students' needs was therefore essential. When the project to create a master's programme started, SDC had already been working with partners to modernise career guidance counselling in Mongolia¹. Career guidance desks in TVET schools had been established (Youth Employment Support Desks), and counsellors and career specialists were trained to strengthen their theoretical and practical knowledge, leading to improved employment services. Moreover, closer cooperation between the TVET schools and the private sector made the services more demand oriented.

The next and last step in the professionalisation of career guidance counselling, which SDC decided to support, was to create a higher education degree programme on career studies.

¹ Through the Vocational Education and Training/Youth Employment Promotion Programme project, implemented by GFA Consulting Group, and through the multi-donor Vocational Skills Development project, funded jointly with the BMZ (Germany) and DFAT (Australia), implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ).

An interdisciplinary degree created at one of the most prestigious Mongolian universities

The National University of Mongolia (NUM), oldest and largest university of Mongolia, was chosen to develop an academic programme on career guidance counselling, through a cooperation agreement with the University of Applied Sciences of the Federal Employment Agency in Mannheim, Germany.

The master's degree programme, named "Career Studies", was developed in 2017 and officially launched in 2018.

A team of NUM researchers and professionals from related fields of practice, with the support of scholars from the University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency of Germany (HdBA Mannheim), co-developed the content and process of the two-year interdisciplinary academic programme. Specific teaching and learning material for the academic programme were developed and/or translated from German into Mongolian. Distance learning modules were developed, making it easier for students from rural areas and people with disabilities to enrol.

MAIN PARTNERS IN THE PROJECT:

Implementers: GIZ and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection

Other national partners: General Office for Labour and Welfare Services and its subsidiaries at province level, Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports and TVET schools

International partner: University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency of Germany

The MSc programme emphasises practical learning, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for real-world challenges. Accessible both in in-class and distance-learning formats, the classes are also scheduled in evenings and weekends so that professionals in full-time employment can attend.

THE CURRICULUM IS ORGANISED IN 7 MODULES DELIVERED OVER THREE SEMESTERS:

Modules	Content
Career guidance as a profession and ethics of guidance	Competence development of consulting professionals; Counselling ethics and consulting associations; Organisation of counselling services and knowledge management; Legal and institutional framework of vocational guidance in Mongolia.
Reference sciences of career guidance	Theories, concepts and methods; Labour market and occupational field analysis, occupational science, vocational science; Human resource management and change management in companies; Economic and business education; Labour market theory, labour market policy; Basic knowledge of social sciences.
Individual counselling	Problem analysis and identification of the need for advice; Professional diagnostics and assessment; Systematic monitoring of individual career choice and integration processes.
Information management and marketing	Job information for different target groups, including gender aspects; Counselling and mediation in group constellations; Information systems and media in vocational guidance.
Job placement strategies and case management	Matching and placement strategies, talent marketing, work entrepreneurship; Employment oriented case management; Business start-up advice.
Networking and marketing in career guidance	Development and maintenance of networks for career guidance and employment services (incl. community capacity building); Marketing strategies for career guidance.
Guided internship	

Source: Dagva-Ochir Bumdari, et al., *From Vocational Orientation to Lifelong and Inclusive Career Guidance: Professionalization of Career Guidance Counselors in Mongolia*, in Michael Scharpf, Andreas Frey (Hg.), 2021, *Vom Individuum her denken; Berufs- und Bildungsberatung in Wissenschaft und Praxis*.

Much more than an academic degree: Benefits that stretch beyond the graduates

As of May 2023, 62 people graduated in the master's Career Studies. The students who enrolled came from public and private employment services, educational institutions from secondary level, TVET and higher education sectors. Some of the master's students were human resources professionals from both private and state-owned companies.

The existence of this academic programme offers several benefits.

- As the first programme of its kind, it equips graduates with academic knowledge and practical skills to effectively work with a diversity of groups, ranging from young TVET students to

long-term unemployed and disadvantaged groups. Graduates acquire valuable social network and case management skills, distinguishing them in their field: "they are employed in public and private sectors.

Some of them started their own businesses in counselling as well as consulting in labour market. In the public sector, many of them are teachers at high schools, counsellors and employment officers in local employment offices". Bazarvaani Khishignyam, PhD, Associate Professor, National University of Mongolia, Teacher of Career Guidance at the Department of Education Psychology, MSc Career Studies

- Better advised jobseekers and students can make informed decision regarding their educational and professional pathways, which can have significant impact on their employment prospects and future lives.
- The private sector benefits through an improved matching of candidates to company demands, reducing financial costs associated with staff training and turnover.

Stories of change: The voices of master's graduates.



Ms. Amarzaya Altantogoo,
Director, National Institute of
Career Studies NGO. Graduate 2019

Before enrolling in the master's programme in Career Studies, I worked as a career guidance professional for 7 years. However, it was through the master's programme that I gained invaluable academic-level theoretical knowledge in the field of career guidance counselling.

There are three key things that stand out as the most important and useful gains from pursuing the master's programme. Firstly, the programme provided me with a broader view of career work. Previously, I had been looking at career guidance counselling solely from a service perspective. However, through the programme, I came to understand the importance of thinking more systematically to improve the employment sector as a whole. This new perspective has been instrumental in shaping my approach to career guidance counselling and has allowed me to make a more significant impact.

Secondly, the programme opened new career opportunities for me. Thanks to the knowledge and expertise gained from the programme, I now work as a consulting expert on projects.

Lastly, it equipped me with the necessary skills and knowledge to establish my own NGO. At a time when there are many problems and challenges in the supply and demand of the labour market, I realised there was a pressing need for training, research, and consulting work, which I now offer. With the NGO, we have undertaken six projects funded by both local and foreign organisations to support employment in our country. Additionally, we have been entrusted with the task of developing job descriptions for emerging occupations and positions in the market, as requested by private sector organisations.

Though not a strict requirement, the master's degree has been instrumental in my career. It provided me with scientific approaches, practical knowledge from international professors, and theoretical foundations. My work as a career guidance counsellor has significantly changed. I have developed tailored methodologies for various target groups and hosted master students in career guidance at the NGO.

The master's team established itself as a reference in the field and is regularly approached by NGOs or secondary and high schools interested in establishing partnerships and collaborate on case studies and other activities to promote career guidance counselling. Especially when it comes to activities targeted at potentially vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQ or people with disabilities:

"There is constant cooperation with projects and NGOs providing career guidance for certain target groups." Bazarvaani Khishignyam, PhD, Associate Professor, NUM, Teacher of Career Guidance at the Department of Education Psychology, MSc Career Studies.



Ms. Erdenetsetseg Jargalsaikhan,
UNDP Upskilling Team Leader
Graduate 2019

Before joining the master's programme, I had been working for six years as a social worker in educational institutions. This is where I realised the importance of providing career guidance counselling to young people before they enter school, which led me to pursue a master's degree in the field and become a counsellor.

As one of the first graduates in the programme, I gained extensive theoretical knowledge and had practical opportunities in the field. This has made a significant difference in my ability to perform my work and has increased my profile in the job market. I have also had the opportunity to work on various employment support projects and collaborate with different organisations, expanding my network and professional opportunities.

Throughout the master's programme, I had the privilege to work with diverse target groups, including immigrants and individuals serving sentences in prisons. The programme expanded my horizons, introducing me to various partners and organisations within the employment support field, which I had never previously imagined.

Upon completing my master's degree, I worked as a consultant, expert, and counsellor, primarily focusing on employment support projects and career guidance. Then, an opportunity came up with UNDP, which is still my current job. Additionally, I am continuing my studies as a doctoral student in psychology, further enhancing my expertise.

Overall, the master's degree has not only transformed my career but has also allowed me to make a significant impact in helping others and shaping career guidance programmes. My fellow graduates have also found success in the consulting service market, and we are collectively working on projects and programmes that aim to support individuals in their career journeys.



Bringing career guidance to the next level: Lessons learned from Mongolia.

- One of the most important learnings from the creation of an academic programme in career guidance counselling is the value of delivering the courses in hybrid formats, including distance learning. This facilitated access to students in rural areas, people with disabilities, and allowed professionals from both private and public sectors to engage and professionalise. In addition, during the COVID pandemic, NUM used the acquired knowledge and experiences from this programme to establish other distance learning programmes.

- Partnering with an established and specialised university like HdBA Mannheim enables the creation of a comprehensive programme with teaching and learning materials from the very start and ensures alignment with the latest international research and practice.

- Collaborating on the creation of a master's programme requires time and sustained support from donor agencies like SDC as it takes time to build up all its components. *"Establishing and sustaining new structures under a collaboration with academic institutions might require longer and consistent support from a donor agency, with a gradual reduction of the engagement. Because all the content, approach, methodology and didactics have to be newly developed or adapted to the local context, in parallel to institutional capacity building of the main partner."* Zayasaikhan Dugeree, Senior National Programme Officer, SDC Mongolia

- After acquiring knowledge and learning materials, respondents have suggested that the university could consider developing a non-degree training programme for professionals interested in improving their career guidance skills through shorter, certificate-based training.

The master's programme Career Studies (now in the fifth iteration) continues to be offered, yet enrolment dropped considerably from 2018 to 2022. The drop is explained by the fact that no more scholarships are provided to interested students and that the degree itself does not really alter job prospects in the public sector. Moreover, the Mongolian Ministry of Education and Science discontinued its policy of offering career guidance sessions in schools. This created a drawback to the project as the need for trained career guidance professionals dropped.

Recommendations for the sustainability of such an academic programme include:

- Pay close attention to the changing priorities and policy environment of the career guidance sector. Cross-sectoral support and commitment is key. In the Mongolian case, the University offering the MSc (NUM) is an entity funded by the Ministry of Education and Science, while career guidance is a part of public employment services under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Lack or change of alignment between the ministries could limit the impact of the project.

- Consideration of sustainable funding sources is crucial. The programme was originally subsidised by Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and now relies on tuition fees. If enrolment drops, funding may not be sufficient to maintain it in the long run.

- Effective communication and a specific marketing strategy for such a new and innovative programme are needed to promote it to students, employers from the private sector, and policymakers.