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Running Head: EDUCATION OF CGC IN NORDIC COUNTRIES

Diverse histories, common ground and a shared future: The education of career guidance and  
counselling professionals in the Nordic countries

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### **Abstract**

The development of education programmes in career guidance and counseling (CGC) has followed different paths among the various Nordic countries. Ten CGC programmes in Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden were evaluated against the NICE curricular model. The results show that all NICE core competences are represented in the curricula. However, there is greater focus in some programmes on developing competences for individual career guidance, than on developing competences for working at organisational and societal levels. Implications for the cooperation and professionalisation of CGC within the Nordic countries are discussed as well as limitations of the NICE model.

### **Résumé**

De diverses histoires, un terrain commun et un avenir partagé: la formation des professionnels du conseil et de l'orientation scolaire et professionnelle dans les pays nordiques

L'élaboration des programmes de formation dans le domaine du conseil et de l'orientation scolaire et professionnelle (CGC) a suivi des trajectoires différentes selon les pays nordiques. Dix programmes de la CCG au Danemark, en Finlande, au Groenland, en Islande, en Norvège et en Suède ont été évalués par rapport au plan de formation élaboré par NICE. Les résultats montrent que toutes les compétences de base élaborées par NICE sont représentées dans les programmes. Cependant, dans certains programmes, l'accent est davantage mis sur le développement de compétences dans la prise en charge individuelle que sur le développement de compétences permettant de travailler au niveau organisationnel et sociétal. Les implications pour la coopération et la professionnalisation de la CCG dans les pays nordiques ainsi que les limites du modèle élaboré par NICE sont discutées.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Unterschiedliche Geschichte, Gemeinsamkeiten und eine gemeinsame Zukunft: Ausbildung von Berufsberatungs- und Beratungsfachleuten in den nordischen Ländern

Die Entwicklung von Studienprogrammen in der Bildungs- und Berufsberatung (BBB) hat in den verschiedenen nordischen Ländern unterschiedliche Wege verfolgt. Zehn BBB-Programme in Dänemark, Finnland, Grönland, Island, Norwegen und Schweden wurden anhand des NICE-Curriculums bewertet. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass alle NICE-Kernkompetenzen in den Lehrplänen vertreten sind. In einigen Programmen wird jedoch mehr Wert auf die Entwicklung von Kompetenzen für die individuelle Laufbahnberatung gelegt als auf die Entwicklung

von Kompetenzen für die Arbeit auf organisatorischer und gesellschaftlicher Ebene. Die Implikationen für die Zusammenarbeit und Professionalisierung von BBB in den nordischen Ländern werden ebenso diskutiert wie die Begrenzungen des NICE-Modells.

### **Resumen**

Historias diversas, puntos en común y un futuro compartido: la educación de los profesionales de la orientación profesional en los países nórdicos

El desarrollo de los programas de educación en orientación y asesoramiento profesional (CGC) ha seguido diferentes caminos en los distintos países nórdicos. Se evaluaron diez programas de CGC en Dinamarca, Finlandia, Groenlandia, Islandia, Noruega y Suecia con respecto al modelo curricular NICE. Los resultados muestran que todas las competencias básicas de NICE están representadas en los planes de estudio. Sin embargo, algunos programas se centran más en el desarrollo de competencias para la orientación profesional individual que en el desarrollo de competencias para trabajar a nivel organizativo y social. Se discuten las implicaciones para la cooperación y profesionalización de CGC en los países nórdicos, así como las limitaciones del modelo NICE.

*Keywords:* CGC education programmes, career guidance counselling professionals, Nordic countries, NICE competence model, professional development

**Diverse histories, common ground and a shared future: the education of career guidance and counselling professionals in the Nordic countries**

**Introduction**

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands; Finland; Iceland; Norway; and Sweden) form a geographic, cultural and economic cluster within Europe, sharing common social values that are reflected in the Nordic welfare model (Greve, 2006; Olafsson, 2003). However, the Nordic countries are not quite as uniform as often claimed (Calmfors, 2014), as evident, for instance, in differences between their career guidance systems and in the education and training of career guidance and counselling professionals. In spite of many similarities, career guidance and counselling (CGC) in the Nordic countries varies in terms of its history and of what is emphasised in practice and research. The education programmes for CGC professionals in the Nordic countries have followed varying paths, primarily influenced by national policies and educational reforms (Plant, 2003; Plant, Christiansen, Lovén, Vilhjálmsdóttir & Vuorinen, 2003). However, the international competency framework presented by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG, 2003) has also influenced their curricula. The education programmes also share common roots in terms of their overall objective; i.e. the need to support career guidance and career education of young people (Plant, 2003), as well as within the adult education sector (Vilhjálmsdóttir, Dofradóttir & Kjartansdóttir, 2011). Recently, pan-European collaboration in the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) has resulted in the development of NICE core competences (NCC) for use in the education and training of CGC professionals (Schiersmann et al., 2012).

The main purpose of the study presented here was to conduct a systematic evaluation of Nordic training curricula for CGC professionals against the NICE core competences, as well as comparing and contrasting the different curricula. European CGC education programmes have previously been evaluated against the IAEVG competence framework and initial work has been done applying the NICE competences (e.g. Ertelt, 2012). Nordic practices and research in CGC have been described, compared and contrasted in two papers (Plant, 2003; Plant et al., 2003). This is the first comprehensive evaluation and comparison of the Nordic programmes and thereby constitutes an important contribution to the future development of education programmes for CGC professionals. It is important to focus on the Nordic countries because they form a cultural entity and share the welfare state ideal but have different national policies, institutions and practices. The application of the NICE

framework casts an important light on the education of career guidance counsellors and contributes to an understanding of the diverse traditions and practices that exist within Europe. This can lead to further international cooperation between programmes and the development of joint Nordic programmes, as well as supporting student and teacher mobility.

### **Policies and practices**

The Nordic countries participate in the European Economic Area (EEA). A majority of them are member states but all are influenced by European resolutions on higher education, as well as policies on lifelong education and guidance (e.g. Council of the European Union, 2004; 2008), as identified by Vuorinen and Leino (2009). All countries were represented in the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), which ran from 2007 - 2015, and in the NICE network from 2009 - 2015.

The provision of career guidance and counselling in schools (up to and including upper secondary level) is a legal obligation in all Nordic countries. In Finland and Denmark, this is also the case for public employment services. In Finland, everyone (children, young people and adults) is legally entitled to guidance and there are comprehensive national policies for lifelong CGC services, the implementation of which is actively supported by stakeholders at all levels (Vuorinen & Lerkkanen, 2011). The remaining Nordic countries currently do not have overall national policies or frameworks for CGC services. In Norway and Iceland, efforts have recently been made to prepare such policies (Official Norwegian Report, 2016: Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015). In line with the strong legal mandate, career guidance services are largely publicly funded and provided free of charge to citizens. CGC services are delivered within a variety of sectors and institutions. However, how this implementation has evolved and the forms it currently takes vary between the Nordic countries based on differing national laws, policies and traditions. Nevertheless, a few common threads can also be detected.

The Nordic countries all have long tradition of providing career guidance counselling in schools, offering both career guidance and career education to young people. Public employment services are also well established but staffed with a broad array of different professional groups. In a Danish study from 2003, only 10% of the total staff in public employment services had formal qualifications in CGC (Plant, 2003). In Sweden, qualified CGC professionals work in the education system, with only a quarter of the employees in public employment services having the same qualifications. Universities and colleges in the Nordic countries offer career services and counselling, but are seldom staffed by qualified guidance professionals (Plant, 2003), except in Iceland (Vilhjálmisdóttir, 2016). Two thirds of the professionals that belong to the career counselling and

guidance association in Iceland work in the school system, 8% in universities and approximately 20% with adults (FNS, 2012).

Under the influence of EU lifelong learning policies (Vuorinen & Leino, 2009), adults in the Nordic countries are served within adult education, community and at their workplaces in addition to the guidance provided by employment services (NVL, 2008; Vilhjálmsdóttir et al., 2011). Trade unions are involved in adult education and guidance, as are employers' unions in several instances (Saar, Ure, & Desjardins, 2013; Vilhjálmsdóttir et al., 2011). While many of those working with guidance in the Nordic countries have relevant CGC education, there are also many with other educational backgrounds. The Nordic network for adult learning (NVL) argues that this results in different ways of understanding career guidance for adults (NVL, 2017).

The education of career guidance counsellors is an important factor to focus on in relation to service quality but has mainly been discussed in the context of policymaking (e.g. ELGPN, 2015; OECD, 2004). The desire to professionalise CGC has been an important impetus for the development of standards and competence frameworks (IAEVG, 2003; CEDEFOP, 2009; NICE, Schiersmann et al., 2012; 2016). In spite of such comprehensive frameworks, however, very few empirical studies have been conducted on CGC training curricula. Repetto (2008) and her colleagues conducted a survey among practitioners to validate the IAEVG framework. Ertelt et al. (2012) used the IAEVG competences to describe the curricula of 58 European MA programmes and performed a preliminary analysis examining how well they represent the NICE curricula. Recently, Allan and Moffet (2016) used one part of the NICE competence framework to study the professional development of CGC trainees in Scotland. The Nordic CGC education programmes were included in the cross-national studies (Ertelt et al., 2012) and participated in the development of the existing competence frameworks. However, their curricula have not been comprehensively evaluated against the most recently developed NICE framework, which is based on the context, practices and policies of CGC in Europe. This raises the question: Do the Nordic CGC education programmes reflect the NICE core competences in their curricula? Before describing the NICE competence framework, we will take a closer look at the educational landscapes for career guidance counsellors in the Nordic countries.

### **CGC education programmes and qualification requirements**

The history and development of formal qualifications for career guidance and counselling professionals in the Nordic countries is quite diverse. In Finland, educational programmes started to emerge in the 1970s, but developed into postgraduate programmes during the 1980s (Vuorinen & Lerkkanen, 2011). The first bachelor's degree programmes were established in Sweden during this period and remain the primary model for training

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CGC professionals (Lovén, 2015; Plant, 2003). Finnish and Swedish CGC training programmes were among the first academic training programmes for guidance counsellors established in Europe (Ertelt et al., 2012). Iceland subsequently followed a similar path of development to Finland, initially offering a one-year postgraduate degree in 1990. Since 2010, a two-year master's degree programme has been offered (see Table 1).

In Denmark, there is a history stretching back to the 1960s of educational programmes within CGC, in the form of courses of further education. However, it was not until the passing of the 'Guidance Act' in 2003 that CGC training entered the higher education sector in the form of bachelor's, diploma and master's degree programmes. In the wake of school reforms in Norway in 2006 and the introduction of new regulations governing CGC in secondary education (Forskrift til opplæringslova, 2006), higher education institutions were asked to offer courses in career guidance and counselling corresponding to 60 ECTS, funded by the government. Until then, few higher education programmes had offered education in CGC; of the few that did, the courses available were mostly limited to 30 ECTS or less. More recently, a master's degree in CGC was established in 2014 as a collaboration between two Norwegian universities (see Table 1).

Greenland and the Faroe Islands are autonomous countries within the Kingdom of Denmark and form a special case when it comes to the education of CGC professionals. In Greenland, guidance and training of guidance practitioners is offered by the commercial school in Nuuk. However, no programmes are offered as part of higher education. In the Faroe Islands, short in-service education courses have been offered to practitioners and a part-time postgraduate programme was offered for the first time in 2013 at the University of the Faroe Islands. The CGC training programme in Greenland was included in the study despite not being offered at tertiary level; the new Faroese master's programme, meanwhile, was still on the drawing board when the study was conducted in 2013, as was the case with the recently introduced master's degree programme in Norway, and these programmes are therefore not included in the study.

With the exception of the unique programme in Greenland, all programmes are offered by higher education institutions. Most are at postgraduate level, as is the case with two thirds of the European CGC academic programmes (Ertelt, et al., 2012). In Denmark and Norway, the programmes are located and conceptualised as continuous education or continuing in-service training in contrast to traditional academic programmes that are seen as pre-service training (CEDEFOP, 2009). As shown in Table 1, the CGC education programmes in the Nordic countries vary in both length (ECTS 15 - 300) and level (bachelor – master), reflecting the differing qualification requirements for guidance practitioners. In Iceland, a master's degree in CGC is required to receive a practitioner licence from the Ministry of Education (Lög um náms- og



starfsráðgjafa, 35/2009). In Denmark and Finland, permanent positions in public guidance centres and in the education system require relevant qualifications at diploma or master's degree levels. Counsellor education at upper secondary level is required to work as a guidance practitioner in Greenland. In Sweden and Norway, there are no legally stipulated requirements, but in Sweden, public schools request CGC qualification.

With regard to students' academic background, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands all offer master's degree programmes that admit students with a variety of bachelor's level qualifications. In Denmark, there is also a specific diploma degree programme (at bachelor's degree level) that gives access to the master's degree programme. In Greenland, CGC training comprises a shorter course (420 student hours) that does not award ECTS points.

In spite of differences in length, the programmes exhibit a number of clear similarities in terms of curricular content. They all include courses on the professional role of CGC (e.g. Guidance and the guidance practitioner, Intervention and programme evaluation); counselling theories and processes (e.g. Career development theories, Counselling from a developmental and learning perspective); and focus on systems relevant for counselling services (e.g. Career counselling in a state of change, Guidance and society). Based on the titles of the courses in the curricula, they all seem to cover the three knowledge modules in the NICE framework: individuals and careers; organisations, groups and communication; and society, politics and markets. Additionally, many of the programmes have courses on research methods and some include mandatory work placement courses. The diversity in the history and conceptualisation of CGC education programmes raises the question: How similar or different are the Nordic programmes in their curricular design?

### **The tuning method and education of CGC professionals**

Being part of the European community, higher education in the Nordic countries has been influenced by EU resolutions such as the Bologna Process and the development of the European Qualification Framework (EQF, 2008). Only Sweden has national standards for career counsellor education programmes, while in Finland, the standards for CGC education are described in national core curricula. No specific standards for CGC education programmes exist in Denmark, Iceland or Norway. In most of the Nordic countries, programmes are evaluated through the national accreditation procedures for higher education.

In order to systematically compare the curricula of the Nordic CGC education programmes, we decided to use the NICE core competences (NCC) and curricular framework (Schiersmann et al., 2012). Although a few other international competence frameworks for guidance practitioners exist, most notably IAEVG (2003) and

CEDEFOP (2009), the NICE model was selected for this analysis. It is the most recent transnational framework focusing on core competences of CGC practitioners and is based on analysis of practices at 44 higher education institutions across Europe offering CGC training programmes. Furthermore, the NICE core competences take EU policies on career guidance into account (Katsarov & Weber, 2012; Schiersmann et al., 2012).

The NICE core competences were developed based on the tuning method (Schiersmann et al., 2012), which linked the political objectives of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy to the development of higher education (Wagenaar & Ferreras, 2008). The result of this process was the development of a set of common points of reference (CPR) for higher education programmes in career guidance and counselling. The NICE CPR consist of (a) NICE professional roles (NPR), providing the practical foundation for the model, (b) NICE core competences (NCC), describing the competences required for career practitioners to enact these professional roles and (c) the NICE curricular model (Schiersmann et al., 2012), which suggests relevant learning outcomes.

The NICE curricular model includes the NPR and NCC. It has three different components: 1. Knowledge (K), 2. Competences (C) and, 3. Professionalism (P). The NICE curricular model is presented as a pantheon, as shown in figure 1. *Knowledge* includes information concerning individuals and careers (K1); organisations, groups and communication (K2); and society, politics and markets (K3). *Competences* include career education (C1); career information and assessment (C2); career counselling (C3); programme and service management (C4); and social systems interventions and development (C5). *Professionalism* integrates the other components into an understanding of career guidance and counselling as a profession (Schiersmann et al., 2012, 2016). The pan-European CPR introduced here is the curricular model used to systematically evaluate and compare the Nordic programmes in this study, providing an opportunity for critical discussion of the NCC as a framework for curricular analysis and comparison.

### **The present study**

The Nordic programmes have referred to international competence frameworks for career professionals (e.g. IAVEG, 2003) in their curricular design. They have also been active participants in the formulation of the competence standards. It is therefore expected that they will generally reflect the NICE core competences in their curricula. In line with the initial analysis of European CGC programmes by Ertelt et al. (2012), we do not expect the different NICE components to be equally represented. Given the historical foundations of Nordic CGC practices in schools and a review of the course names, we expect career education to be well represented in the curricula alongside individual approaches such as career counselling, the use of information and

assessment. The legally mandated right of citizens to career counselling and the context of the Nordic welfare society lead us to expect that Social system interventions (C5) and development will be emphasised in the CGC educational programmes. Given that CGC practitioners in the Nordic countries are usually public-sector employees working within the education system, we do not expect management competences to be widely taught. Given the almost 30-year-old tradition of educating career counsellors described here, higher education programmes are well established and accreditations required for practice in the three of the countries, thus developing professionalism in the students is likely to be a stronghold.

The diverse history, national policies and apparent structural differences in the CGC education programmes in the Nordic countries lead us to expect important curricular differences. The number of ECTS points awarded varies across the countries as do the entry requirements for the master's programmes. The content descriptions and names of courses also indicate possible differences, especially in the focus on developing the students' competences to work on meso and macro level such as those related to organisation, groups and societal issues.

### **Method**

To assess the curricula of the various CGC education programmes against the NICE curricular model and compare the programmes across the Nordic countries, a quantitative approach was chosen. This gives a broad overview of curricula and was found suitable for this first systematic comparison of CGC education programmes in the Nordic countries. We developed a questionnaire based on the nine components of the NICE model (see figure 1). Programme teachers and coordinators/faculty in all the Nordic countries evaluated the curriculum of their programme against the learning outcomes defined for each component of the NICE curricular model.

### **Participants**

Nordic CGC education programmes were selected for the study, mainly through the VALA network of career counselling programmes<sup>i</sup> soon after it was established in 2012. Representatives from 10 out of 12 (83%) of the participating higher education programmes in the VALA network responded to the survey (N=10). These programmes represent a majority (ca. 70%) of all CGC education programmes offered in the Nordic countries at the time.

### **Measures**

As can be seen in Figure 1, the NICE curricular model consists of nine components: three main modules comprising five competences (C1-C5) based on the professional roles described above resting on three

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knowledge foundations (K1 – K3) and tied together by professionalism (P1). We decided to use the learning outcomes or core competences as first presented under the heading “Learning outcomes (core competences and sub competences)” in each part of the model (see Schiersmann et al., 2012, pp. 66 - 81).

Each learning outcome is represented by a number of separate statements within each of the nine components of the model (from 4 in K1 to 10 in C4) and constitute the items in the questionnaire, 59 in total. For example, *Providing people with support to improve their competences for lifelong learning* (from C1-Career education); *Approaching and intervening in existing networks and communities and building new ones* (from C5-Social systems interventions and development); *Management theories: strategic planning and controlling, organisational decision-making (micro-economics); project management; quality/process management* (from K2- Organisations, groups and communication; see Schiersmann et al., 2012, pp. 66 – 81). All 59 learning outcomes are categorised in line with the nine components of the NICE curricular model and can be seen in tables 1 and 2 in the results section below. The participants were asked: “To what extent do you think students in your programme get an opportunity to develop the following competences?” Similar to the study by Ertelt et al. (2012), they were asked to respond to each competence statement on a five-point Likert-type scale labelled 0 = not at all; 1 = small, 2 = some, 3 = largely, 4 = completely.

### Procedure

We decided to elicit curricular evaluations from academic staff. Academic staff at CGC education programmes are usually responsible for the design and implementation of the curriculum and are familiar with the terminology used in competence frameworks. Therefore, they presumably provide the most accurate evaluations given the current state of knowledge. This approach also offers an alternative view than that provided by Ertelt et al. (2012), who used external evaluations of the curricula of European programmes. Liaisons for the VALA network were contacted at each programme and informed of the study’s purpose. They also received a link to the online version of the survey and the instructions for using the rating scales. They did not receive detailed information about who should be involved in the evaluation process because the size and organisational structure of the programmes varies, along with the availability of curricular information. For example, in Iceland and in the Norwegian city of Bergen, small programmes with only two or three teachers and coordinators, the evaluation was completed during a staff meeting in a joint process based on learning outcomes that had been written for the programme as a whole and for each specific module (course) offered. In one of the participating programmes in Denmark, meanwhile, one member of staff completed the survey and then passed it on to a colleague to check for agreement. One curricular evaluation was produced for each of the ten CGC education

programmes analysed in this study. The curricula evaluated were those in effect when the first NICE handbook and competence framework was published in the academic year of 2012-13.

### Results

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were calculated based on the ratings for individual NICE competences as given by each of the ten participating programmes. First, to evaluate CGC education in the Nordic countries, the ratings of individual statements (items) were summarised across programmes and each of the nine components of the NICE curricular model. Second, the mean values for the individual statements comprising each of the nine components of the NICE curricular model are presented. Such a detailed description is important as it allows for a more fine-grained analysis and evaluation of the curricula. Finally, to be able to compare the CGC curricula offered in the Nordic countries, a NICE curricular profile was created for each programme. For ease of presentation, the nine components are split into two groups in the figures and tables used to illustrate the results. The results for the five core competences (C1 - C5) forming the columns in the NICE curricular model are grouped together and presented first. Then the results are presented for the three knowledge foundations (K1-K3) and for professionalism (P1).

#### **Do the Nordic CGC programmes reflect the NICE core competences in their curricula?**

To evaluate the extent to which the various NICE core competences are represented in the Nordic programmes, the mean score for the ratings of each of the curricular model's nine components was calculated across the ten programmes. These mean scores are based on the sum evaluations of the individual learning outcomes (items) making up each of the nine components. The reliability or internal consistency of each component (scale) was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which ranged from .45 – .87. Six of the nine components of the model showed Alpha above .7 (see tables 2 and 3 below), indicating reasonable reliability for the relatively few items (4 -10) within each curricular component. Figure 2 shows the mean ratings for each of the five core NICE competences across all ten programmes, along with the standard deviations of these ratings. Figure 3 shows the mean ratings for the three knowledge foundations and for professionalism. Together, these two figures provide a comprehensive picture of how the education of career guidance counsellors in the Nordic countries reflects the NICE curricular model.

The programmes seem to focus on competences related to C3-Career counselling ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ), followed by C1-Career education ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ) and C2-Career information and assessment ( $M = 2.18$ ;  $SD = 0.63$ ). Staff completing the survey assessed, on average, that students attending their programme had

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some or a good opportunity to develop these three core competences. The standard deviations indicate a greater degree of consensus among the programmes regarding their curriculum's inclusion of competences related to career education than related to counselling or career information and assessment. The results show that there are fewer opportunities for students to develop competences related to C5-Social systems interventions and development ( $M = 2.0$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ) and C4-Programme and service management ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) than competences related to C1 - C3. That is to say, overall the programmes would seem to focus more on preparing students for individual-oriented guidance practices than interventions on an organisational, institutional or community level.

As can be seen in figure 3, the ratings for competences related to the three knowledge foundations once again reflect this focus on individual-oriented guidance practices, with knowledge at the meso and macro levels being rated lower. K3-Society, politics and markets ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ) and K2-Organisations, groups and communication ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) are on average considered not as well covered in programme curricula as knowledge areas related to K1-Individuals and careers ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ). The high standard deviation for knowledge related to working with organisations, groups and communication shows that there is less consensus among the programmes regarding this component than regarding the opportunities to gain knowledge related to societal issues and to individuals. Finally, yet importantly, the ratings suggest that students have fairly good opportunities to gain competences related to P1-Professionalism in the Nordic programmes ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ).

As such, the overall picture would suggest that CGC education programmes in the Nordic countries primarily focus on working with individuals. To better understand what the programme teachers and coordinators consider the strengths and weaknesses of their curricula, we will now take a closer look at the individual learning outcomes within each of the nine components of the NICE model. The means and standard deviations for the individual competences were calculated and are shown in Tables 2 and 3 in descending order within each of the nine NICE model components.

We will start with the areas indicated as being the strongest in the Nordic programmes by the preliminary analysis. As can be seen in Table 2 for C3-Career counselling, all the competences listed in this part of the NICE model are rated between 2 and 3, indicating they are somewhat or largely covered in the curricula. For C1-Career education, the results indicate somewhat less focus on the capacity of students to plan training sessions and develop curricula than other competences. For C2-Career information and assessment, both

assessment and, especially, knowledge of education and labour markets are addressed, but students do not get the same opportunity to learn how to make use of information systems.

There is greater variation between programmes in the ratings of the more macro-level elements (C4 and C5), shown in Table 2, that are not as strongly represented in the curricula. Starting with C4-Programme and services management, students would seem to be given at least some opportunity to master most of the competences, but setting up formal contracts and marketing are hardly touched upon. Within C5-Social systems interventions and development, the results deviate considerably for the individual learning outcomes. Students seem to get opportunities to learn to collaborate with other professionals and interact with networks and stakeholders, but fewer opportunities to learn how to make referrals and mediate in conflicts.

In table 3, there is again evidence of an emphasis on micro-level knowledge as reflected in K1–Individuals and careers. All the competences grouped here average a rating of around 3, indicating that they are quite well represented in the Nordic curricula. The mean ratings in K2–Organisations, groups and communication show an emphasis on group dynamics while suggesting that the programmes shy away from organisational, management and leadership issues. Results in K3-Society politics and markets indicate a focus on special needs, diversity, legal and policy aspects, but emphasis on macroeconomics, labour market structures and information management in CGC training within the Nordic countries.

### **How similar or different are the Nordic programmes in their curricular design?**

Tables 2 and 3 above show the mean ratings for all the competences comprising each component of the NCC model, as well as the standard deviation, which serves as an indicator of how much the programmes differ. To make a more direct comparison of the programmes' curricula, the mean ratings of the competences within each of the nine components of the NICE curricular model were calculated for the individual programmes. Figure 4 shows the programme profiles for the five core competences and Figure 5 presents the three knowledge foundations and professionalism together. The figures can mainly be used to compare the model components across programmes, but they also give an overview of the relative importance or balance of each of the nine components in individual programmes.

Focusing the comparison across the components of the model (C1 through C5), it is clear from figure 4 that the programmes all give students some opportunity to develop competences in all five pillars, but they also differ in terms of the size of each component. Additionally, the standard deviations presented in figures 2 and 3 and the range of mean scores show that there is low variance in C1-Career education ( $SD = 0.41$ ; range of means  $2.80 - 1.60 = 1.20$ ), while there is greater variation in C2-Career information and assessment ( $SD = 0.63$ ; range

of means  $3.00 - 1.20 = 1.80$ ). The programmes also differ somewhat in terms of the emphasis placed on C3-Career counselling ( $SD = 0.58$ ; range  $3.40 - 1.80 = 1.60$ ). As to be expected based on the overall means, C4-Programme and service management and C5-Social systems interventions and development tend to receive less emphasis in the programmes' curricula. There is greater variance for C4 ( $SD = 0.58$ , range  $2.50 - 0.70 = 1.8$ ) than C5 ( $SD = 0.42$  range  $2.63 - 1.63 = 1.00$ ) In Malmö (Sweden), however, pillars C4 and C5 seem to be just as well represented in the curriculum as the other components. The results for Aarhus (Denmark) stand out in that these two pillars appear to be emphasised ahead of training in more individual-oriented guidance practices. The programmes in Oslo, Bergen (both Norway), Malmö (Sweden) and Jyväskylä (JAMK University of applied sciences, Finland) appear to cover C5-Social systems interventions and development well, setting them apart from the other programmes.

Figure 5 presents the mean ratings of the three knowledge foundations (K1 - K3) and of professionalism (P) within each programme. Again, all the programmes offer students opportunities to develop in all these components of the NICE curricular model. The largest variation can be found in K2 ( $SD = 0.67$ ; range  $2.43 - 0.57 = 1.86$ ), suggesting that the programmes are mainly differentiated by how much they emphasise knowledge and competences related to organisations, groups and communication (C4 and C5). As to be expected based on the overall mean ratings, K1-Individuals and careers seems to be well represented in the curricula of the various programmes with little variance ( $SD = 0.41$ , range  $3.75 - 2.50 = 1.25$ ). The programmes also do not differ greatly in relation to K3-Society, politics and markets ( $SD = 0.46$ , range  $2.71 - 1.57 = 1.14$ ). It is notable that P1-Professionalism is rated highly for all the programmes with little variation, if the programme in Greenland, which is not offered at the tertiary level, is excluded ( $SD = 0.51$ , range  $3.25 - 1.38 = 1.87$ ; range without Greenland  $3.25 - 2.50 = 0.75$ ).

Figures 4 and 5 show the balance of different components of the NICE model in the various programme curricula. For example, the CGC education programme in Oslo/Akershus seems to give students similar opportunities to develop all five core competences represented in the pillars of the model. The JAMK programme in Finland likewise balances all NCC. The other programmes do not appear to balance students' opportunities for competence development between the model's components to the same extent. It is important to keep in mind that the programmes in both Greenland (at upper secondary level) and Norway are shorter than in the other countries and do not result in a bachelor's or master's degree.

## Discussion



The evaluation and analysis of Nordic CGC education programmes against the NICE curricular model presented in this article shows, as expected, that the Nordic programmes mainly tend to focus on competences and knowledge related to career counselling and education of individuals. There is clearly less emphasis on developing students' competences for interventions at organisational, institutional and community levels. There especially seems to be room to focus more on developing students' competences to address organisational issues, management, leadership, contracting and marketing. Nevertheless, there is some focus on the needs of particular client groups and on diversity issues and policy development as expected. Opportunities to develop generic professional competences (professionalism) as described in the NICE model are clearly provided across the Nordic countries. However, there are also differences in emphasis between countries and programmes. The greatest variation is found in relation to knowledge and competences at the macro level, especially regarding programme and service management, but also in the emphasis placed on career information and assessment and, to a lesser extent, career counselling.

### **Similarities and differences in programmes**

Overall, the Nordic programmes represent all the components of the NICE model in their curricula, but micro-level competences appear to be dealt with more thoroughly than macro-level and meso-level competences. In this respect, the Nordic countries resemble European CGC training programmes in general. The aforementioned study by Ertelt et al. (2012) applying a similar methodology, albeit based on the IAEVG framework, showed that competences related to counselling, career development and assessment were rated highest. The macro-level competence of programme/service management was here found to be of equal importance, in contrast to our findings concerning the Nordic programmes. Other macro-level competences, such as community capacity building, placement, consultation and coordination, generally receive less attention in the European programmes than other components of the model.

The comparison applying the NICE curricular model shows that the Nordic programmes are, with a few exceptions, similar in their content, but generally differ in their structure and organisation. The description of the programmes (see table 1) shows that (with the exception of Greenland) they are situated within higher education. They are, however, located in different parts of the respective national higher education systems, constituting either regular degree programmes or courses of continuing education, and at different levels, although most are at master's degree level. These organisational differences, rather than any curricular variation, may hinder student mobility and co-operation among the programmes. In spite of limited language barriers between Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the rate of student and teacher exchange is not high within the CGC

education programmes. The master's degree programmes, especially those offered as part-time courses within the continuing education system, mostly enrol adult students, who have family and work responsibilities and are therefore not as mobile as younger students (Nordplus Higher Education – Final Report, 2016). This analysis shows that, given the similarities in curricular content, it should be fairly straightforward for courses to be accredited across the Nordic CGC education programmes, thereby supporting mobility, but these possibilities have not been fully exploited.

### **Applications and limitations of the NICE core competences**

Common curricular frameworks (IAEVG 2003, NICE 2012) serve as benchmarks for evaluating and comparing career counselling and guidance training programmes. The most recent pan-European NICE model has allowed us to draw a comprehensive picture of the Nordic programmes, comparing and contrasting them. Nevertheless, the model has two main limitations. Firstly, the NICE curricular framework does not take research-related activities within the CGC education programmes properly into account. Research is a central component of the Nordic master's degree level CGC education programmes, often comprising compulsory courses introducing specific methods to be applied in independent studies (such as a master's thesis). The reason why this becomes invisible in the NICE conceptualisation might be found in the way that the role of CGC professionals is described in relation to research: "They (CGC professionals) integrate current research and theory into their practice and keep up with societal and technological developments" (Schiersmann et al., 2012, p.47).

Alternative competence frameworks such as IAEVG include a separate category referred to as research and evaluation.

Secondly, the NICE model does not allow for a fine-grained analysis of generic vs. sector-specific competences (as found in CEDEFOP 2009 and a number of national competence frameworks). This may, however, prove helpful in working towards the development of a unified professional identity, which is needed to provide continuity and coherence in services provided by dispersed delivery networks (CEDEFOP, 2009) and programmes that meet the needs of citizens in multiple service sectors providing lifelong guidance.

Apart from these problems arising from the particular choice of framework (NICE curricular model) for this analysis, the study itself also has certain limitations. We do not know if the participants all understood and applied the Likert-type rating scale in a similar manner in their evaluations of their programme's curriculum. The results show that, even though the programmes vary significantly in length (30-300 ECTS), this is not always reflected in the responses (see figures 4 and 5) to the extent one would expect. For example, one of the shortest programmes in the survey (Oslo, Norway) seems to cover more competences than possible given the

accredited ECTS. This raises some questions about whether it is valid to use the ratings to compare the weight of each NCC across programmes. Nevertheless, it is notable that the longest programmes (bachelor's degree programmes in Sweden and one of the programmes in Finland) tend to be seen as covering more of the competences than the shorter programmes. In addition, three of the nine curricular components used to present the results have lower Alpha, than 0.7, indicating that the items are not internally consistent or homogenous in the eye of the rater. Despite these recognised limitations of using rating scales, the study provides a useful overview of the similarities and differences between the curricula of Nordic CGC education programmes at this particular point in history. Additionally, it offers an opportunity for future comparison to other European programmes using the NICE framework.

### **Conclusion**

Professionalisation of career guidance and counselling has been a major driver behind the development of international and European standards and competence frameworks for the academic training of career practitioners (IAEVG, 2003; CEDEFOP, 2009; Schiersmann et al., 2012; 2016). This study shows that the CGC education programmes in the Nordic countries provide students with broad opportunities to develop their professional identity as CGC practitioners and to develop core competences in all of the areas identified and described in the NICE model. This should provide the Nordic countries with good opportunities to learn from each other and work together towards deeper professionalisation of the CGC field. However, differences in the structure of the programmes in the Nordic countries raise some concerns in terms of realising the potential benefits through the development of joint degree programmes and mobility of staff and students. Nevertheless, we hope that this analysis will provide a foundation for shared future developments in the education of career guidance and counselling professionals in the Nordic countries.

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Table 1

*Overview of CGC education programmes offered in the Nordic countries*

| Country          | Level of education  | Organisation providing education            | Enrolments per year                               | Opportunities for further qualifications                         | Annual tuitions        |
|------------------|---|---|---|--|------------------------|
| <b>Denmark</b>   | Master's degree (60 ECTS)   | University                                  | 20 students/ semester                             | Possible to continue with a PhD within various fields            | € 7 100                |
|                  | Diploma (bachelor) programme (60 ECTS)  | University College                          | 150 students/ semester                            |  | € 7 800                |
| <b>Finland</b>   | Postgraduate, work-related programme for masters, who are working in the field of CGC (60 ECTS) | University                                  | 140 students/ year                                | Possible to continue with a PhD                                  | None                   |
|                  | Master's degree in education, includes bachelor level (180 ECTS) and specialisation (120 ECTS)  |   | 20  |  |                        |
|                  | Master's degree (120 ECTS)  |   | 22  |  |                        |
| <b>Greenland</b> | Basic training 420 hours, (ECTS not applicable)   | Center for National Vejledning (Government) | 20 students/semester                              | There are supplementary courses                                  | None                   |
| <b>Iceland</b>   | Master's degree (120 ECTS)  | University                                  | 30 - 40 students/ year                            | Possible to continue with a PhD                                  | Registration fee € 500 |
| <b>Norway</b>    | Postgraduate, part-time courses (15-60 ECTS)  | University                                  | Numbers not available                             | Possible to enter the master's degree programme                  | € 100 per ECTS         |
|                  | Master's degree (120 ECTS)  |   | 50  | Possible to continue with a PhD                                  | None                   |
| <b>Sweden</b>    | Bachelor's degree (180 ECTS)  | University                                  | Around 220 students start the programme each year | Master's degree (120 ECTS), then possible to continue with a PhD | None                   |

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|  |   |  |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
|  | Postgraduate programme (30 ECTS) for students with bachelor's level qualification as a teacher or social worker or within human resources |  |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|



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Table 2

*Means and standard deviations of the individual NICE core competences across the 10 programmes*

| NICE core competences   | Alpha | Mean | SD   |
|---|-------|------|------|
| <b>C1 Career Education</b>  | .45   |      |      |
| Providing people with support on improving their competences for lifelong learning  |       | 2.50 | 0.71 |
| Teaching people how to become aware of their strengths, how to use systems and techniques of gathering information on available jobs, vocational and educational training, how to plan, manage, implement and review their career, and how to apply effectively for working or learning opportunities |       | 2.40 | 0.70 |
| Facilitating learning in different types of groups and communities  |       | 2.30 | 0.67 |
| Planning training sessions  |       | 2.00 | 1.05 |
| Developing curricula for training programmes  |       | 1.80 | 0.42 |
| <b>C2 Career Information and Assessment</b>   | .84   |      |      |
| Explaining the world of work, vocational and educational systems, as well as trends and developments in the labour markets and educational systems  |       | 2.70 | 0.48 |
| Providing clients with information and assessment methods that support them in autonomously assessing how suitable particular educational and vocational opportunities are for them   |       | 2.20 | 0.63 |
| Communicating educational, organisational, societal and political requirements and opportunities appropriately, taking into consideration the needs and capacity of clients, and reducing the complexity of information   |       | 2.10 | 1.10 |
| Employing different assessment techniques for identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks of clients   |       | 2.10 | 0.88 |
| Making use of information systems   |       | 1.80 | 0.92 |
| <b>C3 Career Counselling</b>  | .76   |      |      |
| Supporting clients in identifying solutions and making decisions related to complex career issues (e.g. setting goals and priorities)   |       | 2.90 | 0.57 |
| Employing ideographic and reflective approaches (e.g. solution-centred questioning, story-telling, reframing)   |       | 2.90 | 0.57 |
| Supporting clients in dealing with complex biographical issues related to life, work and identity   |       | 2.60 | 0.70 |
| Motivating clients and supporting them in identifying and activating resources, allowing them to pursue their life projects as autonomously as possible.  |       | 2.60 | 1.07 |
| Working alongside their clients in developing and pursuing goals over long periods of time, mastering career transitions and dealing with uncertainty (if necessary)  |       | 2.10 | 1.10 |
| <b>C4 Programme and Service Management</b>  | .84   |      |      |
| Ensuring compliance with relevant regulation  |       | 2.40 | 0.84 |
| Developing capacity for handling change and organisational development  |       | 2.30 | 1.06 |
| Leading colleagues and cooperating with significant stakeholders  |       | 2.20 | 1.03 |
| Managing projects and on-going operations   |       | 2.10 | 0.74 |
| Managing important information and knowledge  |       | 2.10 | 1.20 |
| Presenting evidence to secure the services which best meet clients' needs   |       | 2.00 | 0.94 |
| Making organisational decisions on how to manage resources (including their own time) effectively and efficiently   |       | 1.90 | 0.74 |
| Assessing and evaluating the quality of CGC activities (processes and outcomes)   |       | 1.90 | 0.88 |
| Setting up contracts with clients (individuals or organisations)  |       | 1.60 | 0.97 |
| Marketing/ advertising CGC services and organisations   |       | 0.80 | 0.63 |
| <b>C5 Social Systems Interventions and Development</b>  | .45   |      |      |
| Collaborating with different professionals (for instance career workers, social workers, educators, psychologist, rehabilitators, probation officers, etc.)   |       | 2.6  | 0.52 |

(table continues)

## EDUCATION OF CGC IN NORDIC COUNTRIES

|  |      |      |
|--|------|------|
| Approaching and intervening existing networks and communities and building new ones  | 2.40 | 0.97 |
| Consulting organisations in career-related questions of their stakeholder (e.g. recruitment, placement or personnel development of employees, career management competences of pupils) | 2.30 | 0.82 |
| Making arrangements with stakeholders with-in systems  | 2.00 | 0.67 |
| Coordinating activities of different professionals   | 2.00 | 0.82 |
| Advocating and negotiating on behalf of their clients in relevant contexts (e.g. work teams, families, formal proceedings)   | 1.90 | 0.88 |
| Making referrals   | 1.40 | 1.07 |
| Mediating conflicts between clients and their social environments  | 1.40 | 1.17 |

Table 3

*Means and standard deviations of the individual NICE knowledge foundations and professionalism across the 10 programmes*

| NICE knowledge and professionalism  | Alpha | Mean | SD   |
|---|-------|------|------|
| <b>K1 Individuals and Careers</b>   | .74   |      |      |
| Theories of career choice and planning: trait & factor theories, constructivist approaches, life designing, social learning theories, work adjustment theory, social-cognitive perspective, planned happenstance, serendipity   |       | 3.20 | 0.42 |
| Theories of career and professional development: understanding of biographical developments due to career changes and phase of life   |       | 3.00 | 0.47 |
| Theories related to individual self-organisation processes (e.g. learning competence development, Learning theories, decision making processes/heuristics, work-life-balance, self-motivation, time management, setting priorities etc.)  |       | 2.80 | 0.63 |
| Psychological theories on individual personality traits and behaviours (e.g. motivation, interests, Aptitudes, talents, feelings, cognitions, self-efficacy, locus, of control, volition/willpower etc.)  |       | 2.70 | 0.67 |
| <b>K2 Organisations, Groups and Communications</b>  | .87   |      |      |
| Group dynamics and interpersonal communication: Theories on informal relationships/social Systems families, couples, peers/ friendships, small and large groups   |       | 2.70 | 0.82 |
| Organisational theories and organisational communication: Formal structures/relationships (hierarchies, functions, roles, power) and processes of organisations; organizational culture; different types of organisations (bureaucracy, network etc.); diversity in organisations; interaction between organisations and their environments; effects of new technologies (especially IT and ICT) on organisations and employees |       | 1.90 | 0.88 |
| ICT in career guidance and counselling: current innovations in communications technology and how they can be employed in regards to the different NPR; discussion of benefits & drawbacks; methods of combining traditional approaches with new technologies for synergies.   |       | 1.70 | 0.82 |
| Management theories: strategic planning and controlling, organisational decision-making (micro-economics); project management; quality/ process management  |       | 1.40 | 0.70 |
| Change Management/(Organization Development: Theories on organisational change & learning; success factors of planned organisational change   |       | 1.40 | 1.07 |
| Leadership and relevant communication theories: role-modelling; leadership styles; inner organisational communication; conflict management (prevention and solution of conflict); theories related to leadership and moderation of groups   |       | 1.10 | 0.88 |
| Human Resource Management (HRM) and Personal Development (PD) theories and knowledge: understanding of typical HR processes such as recruiting, staffing, rewarding, retaining and developing employees; basics of performance management   |       | 1.10 | 0.99 |
| <b>K3 Society, Politics and Markets</b>   | .57   |      |      |
| Understanding the special needs of particular groups (e.g. physically and mentally challenged clients, economically disadvantaged, cultural/racial and ethnic minorities)   |       | 2.50 | 0.85 |

(table continues)

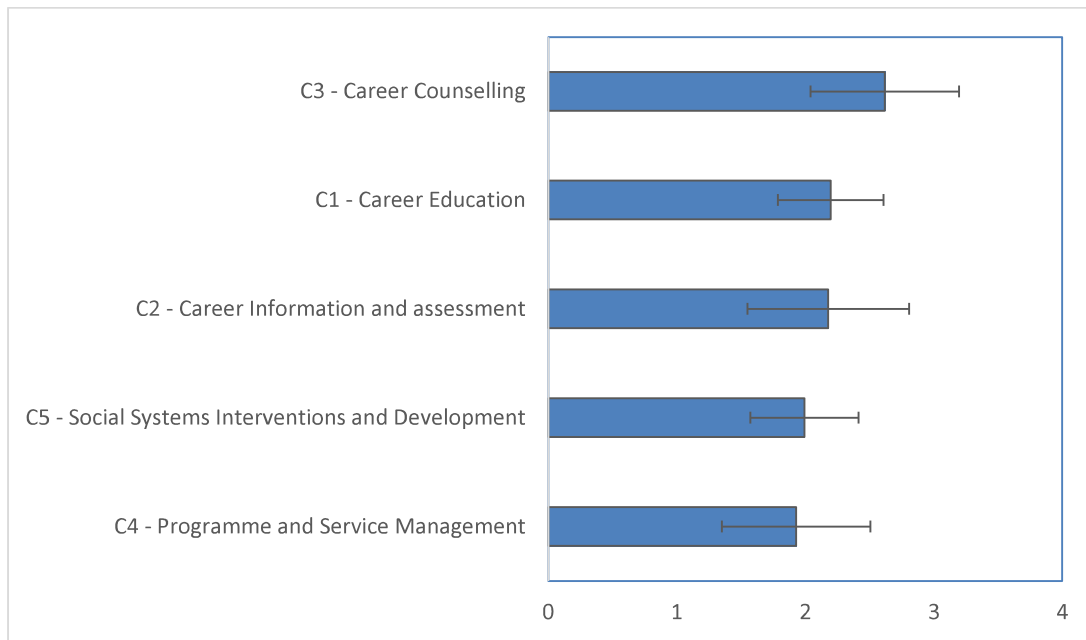
## EDUCATION OF CGC IN NORDIC COUNTRIES

|  |            |      |
|--|------------|------|
| Policy-related knowledge: relevant policy theories/ ideologies; relevant international policy developments (e.g. lifelong learning; Bologna process in Europe); professionalisation of career guidance and counselling   | 2.40       | 0.70 |
| Diversity-related theories: sociological theories on cultural identity, societal norms, and ideology; intercultural communication; diversity management; understanding of discrimination regarding gender, age, race, ability, culture etc.  | 2.30       | 0.67 |
| Legal aspects, legislation and codes of practice regarding employment, education and CGC systems (local, national and international)   | 2.20       | 0.92 |
| Understanding of macro-economics, especially regarding labour market developments and their interrelation with other societal developments (e.g. technological trends, policy-making)  | 2.00       | 0.82 |
| Career-related information management: Sources and types of labour market information (LMI), job tasks, vocations, functions, salaries, requirements and future outlooks sources and types of information on educational programmes and offers information and knowledge management systems; information acquisition management; supply- and demand-oriented information systems for labour markets and educational offers | 1.50       | 1.08 |
| Institutional ethnography: current structure, developments/ trends, and current policy regarding national employment, educational and CGC-related systems (including comparative knowledge of policies and systems)  | 1.40       | 0.97 |
| <b>P1 Professionalism</b>  | <b>.80</b> |      |
| Adapting professional values and ethical standards in their practice of all professional roles; demonstrating openness and understanding for diversity, especially in terms of different values and models for life  | 3.20       | 0.63 |
| Engaging in critical thinking, reflective practice (reflexivity) and continuous learning   | 3.10       | 0.57 |
| Systematically analysing clients' cases in regards to the influences of various individual, communicative, organisational, group-related and societal factors  | 2.70       | 1.06 |
| Engaging in societal debate about the purposes of career guidance and counselling  | 2.60       | 0.52 |
| Promoting career guidance as a social contract for the advancement of equality and social justice, and advocating on behalf of people seeking support in career-related questions  | 2.60       | 0.84 |
| Building and effectively regulating healthy relationships between clients, themselves and other stakeholder (e.g. employers, policy-makers, other professionals)   | 2.50       | 0.71 |
| Finding an adequate balance between their personal and other peoples interests and dealing with potential role conflicts and high levels of uncertainty  | 2.50       | 0.53 |
| Supporting science and policy-making for the advancement of the CGC profession   | 2.40       | 1.17 |

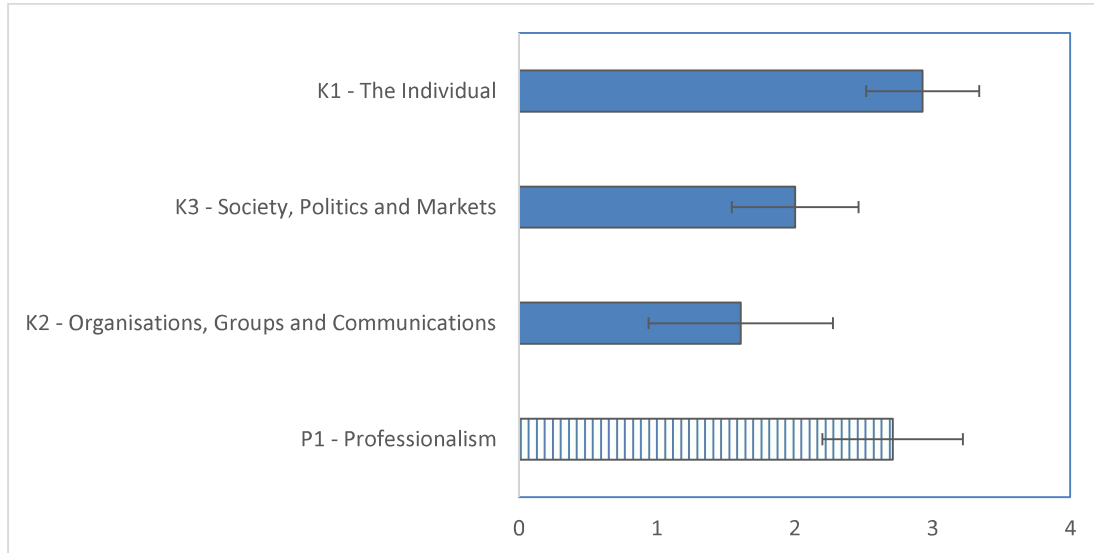


**Figure 1**

*NICE curricular model* (Schiersmann et al., 2012).

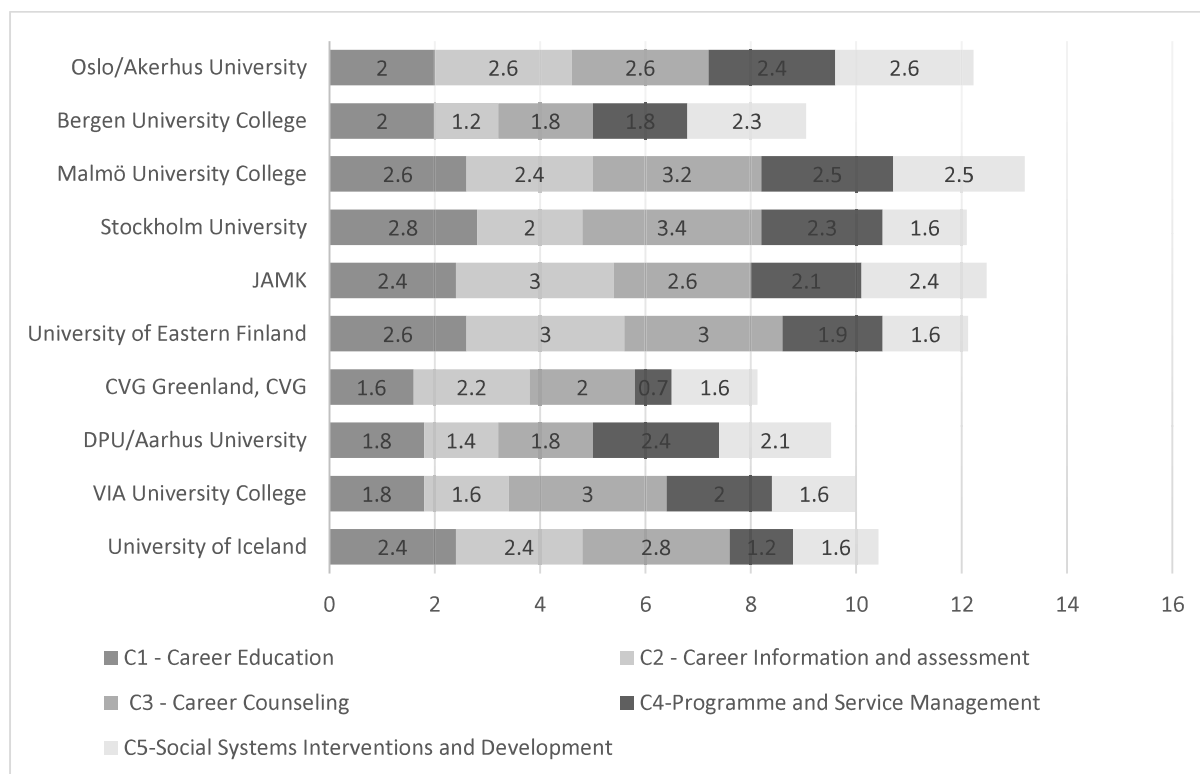
**Figure 2**

*Mean evaluations and standard deviations of the ratings of NICE core competences across Nordic CGC education programmes*

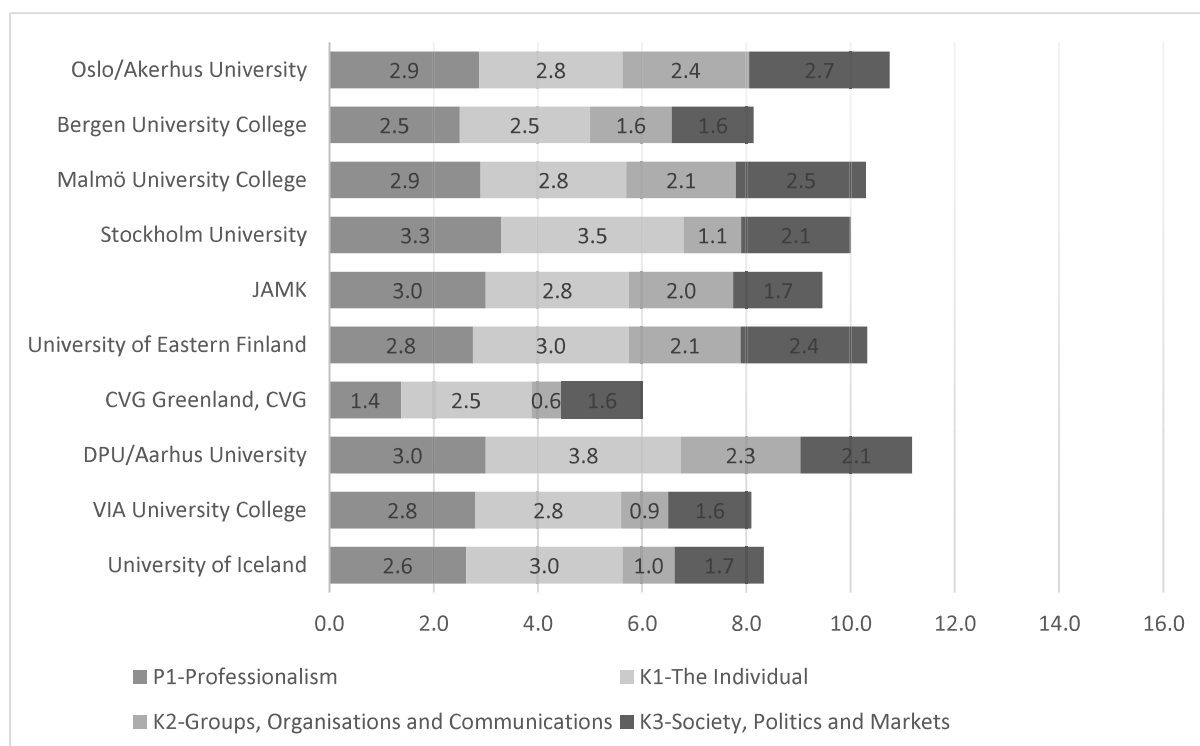
**Figure 3**

*Mean evaluations and standard deviations of the ratings of NICE knowledge foundations and professionalism across Nordic CGC education programmes*

## EDUCATION OF CGC IN NORDIC COUNTRIES

**Figure 4**

*Constellation of NICE core competences in Nordic CGC education programmes*

**Figure 5**

*Constellation of NICE knowledge and professionalism components in Nordic CGC education programmes*

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<sup>i</sup> **VALA** is a network of Career counselling and guidance programmes at higher education institutions in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Eighteen partner institutions have joined hands and established a network to be able to better prepare career counsellors and guidance workers for the diverse clients they work with. See <http://www.peda.net/en/portal/vala>