



## **The Present Status of Career Guidance Services for Higher Secondary Students in Kerala**

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### **Abstract**

The majority of students pursue higher secondary education after matriculation in Kerala under the streams – science, commerce and humanities. The Kerala model of development is well known and it sets high standards for the academic advancements of students. In spite of these achievements the employability of Kerala students is rated as being lower when compared to many other states. One major reason for this deficit is poor career orientation amongst students, especially those who are in early and mid-adolescence. In order to address this issue the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education (DHSE), Kerala, established a Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell. This report provides an overview of the career guidance services provided by the DHSE, Kerala.

**Key words:** career guidance, higher secondary education, Kerala

### **Introduction**

Career guidance and counselling have an important role to play in every developing economy. Kerala, popularly known as “God’s Own Country”, is located in the southern part of India. The Kerala model of development is well known as the state maintains standards at par with developed countries on many counts such as, literacy rate, life expectancy, child mortality, health and hygiene. Despite limited resources Kerala stands well ahead of other Indian States on the Human Development Index (HDI). India is ranked 130<sup>th</sup> in 2015 HDI among 188 countries scoring 0.609. Among Indian states Kerala was the leading one with HDI 0.712.

Today it is well accepted that economic development is closely related to

educational development. In earlier days material capital was considered as the most important resource for the development of a society or nation. But in the case of Kerala it is human capital and this has developed as a result of educational advancement.

Higher studies after Class 10 was a part of university education in Kerala till 1998. The two-year higher secondary course (Grades 11 and 12) was started in a few schools in 1990, and was universalised by 1998. At present there are 2165 higher secondary schools in 14 districts of the state. In addition to this there are 27 higher secondary schools in different countries in the Middle East, Mahe and Lakshadweep under the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education (DHSE), Kerala.

The need for career guidance was felt by the authorities in the beginning years itself. The emergence of new job sectors, establishment of self-financing institutions for professional education, creation of new universities and advertisements by institutions in the private sector increased the dilemma of making career decisions among students. Many students made uninformed career choices and turned away from what they had opted to study, either during the course itself or soon after completing the study. Again the employability and professionalism of a majority of students who complete education from Kerala was rated as just average or below average compared with students of other states. In order to help students, career guidance units were started in 45 schools in 2002-03. The number of units was increased over the years. A Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell was established under the DHSE in 2012. At present 1222 higher secondary schools have career guidance units with one trained teacher working as a career guide. The activities are coordinated by 41 educational district convenors, 14 district joint coordinators, 14 district coordinators, and a state coordinator.

The outcomes expected of the career guidance programmes are that students would be:

- able to select their courses based on their mental ability, aptitude and interests;
- equipped with career planning and strategies;
- well informed about the world of work and have selected multiple career options that they can pursue after the higher secondary course;
- able to resolve conflicts related to career decision-making;
- placed in the right course or right career at the right time.

The school level activities of career guidance units are conducted by the career guide in the school. The duties of the career guide are to:

- help students to identify and achieve their career goals;
- help students to develop the qualities needed to be successful;
- identify sources of information and disseminate information on careers and life skills;
- develop career development ambitions among students;
- enable students to plan and chalk out their education and career path;
- guide students to collect, organise and analyse information related to various courses and careers;
- recognise and respond to students' diverse needs related to education and career planning;
- assess mental ability, aptitudes and interests of students;
- provide support for various entrance examinations.

In order to attain these objectives, the Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell envisions and organises various programmes for students and teachers. The major programmes and services are now presented.

### **Educational District Level Meeting**

The activities of the career guidance units are implemented in higher secondary schools through the career guide. The guide coordinates the activities in the school as per the guidelines of the Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell. Before starting the activities in the school, an educational district level meeting of career guides is arranged in the beginning of each year. The educational district convenor conducts the meeting and the activities to be taken up during the year are discussed in the meeting. A one-day empowerment training for career guides also is conducted on specific topics each year.

### **Path Finder: A – Special Programme for Civil Service Aspirants**

Even in an era of attractive job opportunities in the private sector, many aspire to a career in the Indian Civil

Services. In Kerala, the number of successful candidates in the civil service exam was low until about 10 years ago. But the position has changed a little and major ranks including first and second have been attained by Keralites in recent years. This has given an awakening to upcoming aspirants. The Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling cell in association with the Kerala State Civil Service Academy (an institution under Government of Kerala) conducts a four-day residential orientation programme for higher secondary students who are aspirants to the civil services. The programme discusses different aspects of the preparation for the civil service examination. Interaction with achievers is also conducted as a part of the programme. Seven workshops with 50 participants in one workshop are organised in each year. About 25 students are selected from each district through a preliminary selection examination. Students are given basic information on preparation for the civil service examination such as syllabus, mode of preparation, pattern of questions and mode of examination.

### **Train the Trainers**

As a part of implementing career guidance activities in schools, all the schools were directed to conduct classes related to career guidance with the help of experts in the field. The problem faced by the schools is the non-availability of experts for taking classes, especially in remote areas. Therefore, the DHSE decided to develop interested teachers to take the class on career guidance. Since 2015 training has been provided to 45 career guides with representation from every education district. Selected teachers are trained in presentation skills and are equipped with necessary information to conduct career guidance seminars in higher secondary schools.

### **Focus Point**

In higher secondary schools various combinations of subjects in three streams are taught. Most of the students who desire to get admission the higher secondary course are not aware of different options on

higher studies. They are also unaware of the different skills demanded by different disciplines. During the admission period, help desks named Focus Point function in 75 taluk centres for guiding students in selecting the subject combinations for their studies, supporting students with online submission of applications, and other aspects of the admission process. Two trained career guides are in charge of Focus Point in each centre. Students utilising this service gain a higher level of awareness of different subject combinations for higher secondary education, career options linked to each subject and the mode of applying for admission online.

### **We-Help**

The stress levels of many students increase as examinations approach and in some cases this stress can become acute enough to result in mental health crises. In order to reduce the stress related to exams, the Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell has supported such students through practical advice and guidance on how to moderate the effects of stress and to cope with exams. A separate, temporary telephone connection with toll free facility is established at the DHSE from 1st to 30th March each year for students appearing for annual examinations.

### **Kerala Differential Aptitude Test - KDAT**

In Kerala, every year around 400,000 students graduate from higher secondary courses and they choose higher education streams based on their personal perspectives. Such blind choices may affect the optimisation of effective career decision-making. The DHSE has developed a comprehensive Aptitude test called KDAT. During 2017-18, this tool will be administered in 100 schools as the first phase of implementation of the programme. The test will be made available online and students of the selected schools will have an opportunity to test their aptitudes. The output of the test is a graph which depicts the aptitude of the student in a particular area. A trained counsellor will interpret the graph and

counsel the student and parents in identifying the aptitude of the student.

### After Plus Two Handbook

The plus two period (i.e., 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) is a turning point in the life of an adolescent. Decisions about higher studies and career have to be finalised by the end of higher secondary education. The emergence of various new generation courses and careers, can be confusing and students may struggle to identify their educational path. Career guides are also in confusion about how to identify different courses and careers that suit the students of their schools. This is due to the absence of sufficient information regarding different careers and courses. Hence the Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell has prepared a handbook of different courses and careers, which helps students to choose an apt career. This document acts as a handbook for the career guide. The handbook is made available in all higher secondary schools in time for students to make decisions. It is also available to students as well as the general public through the website of the higher secondary education department. The current details are as follows:

Part 1:

[http://dhsekerala.gov.in/downloads/circulars/1709140241\\_h.pdf](http://dhsekerala.gov.in/downloads/circulars/1709140241_h.pdf)

Part 2:

<http://dhsekerala.gov.in/downloadpage.aspx?mode=P&typ=C&sec=C>

### School-Level Activities

Each career guide conducts different programmes at schools on topics related to career guidance. Some programmes are planned after identifying the need of the students. Since the career guide is a teacher in a school, the activities mentioned are conducted at convenient times during the academic year. The career guidance classes for science, commerce and humanities students are for 2-to-3 hours. These classes provide information on educational and career opportunities as well as on making career decisions. In most cases these classes are

conducted by trainers developed by the department or by external faculty.

### Students' Initiative for Training in Artistic Rejuvenation (SITAR)

Each year, a special art form is selected for specialised training as part of the activities for the promotion of artistic aspirations among students. This specialised training aims at helping students explore the career opportunities in the selected art form. During this specialised training, talented students are provided sessions by masters in the field and are given opportunities to visit national level centres of the selected art form.

In the year 2012-13, *theatre* was selected as art form for specialised training and regional and state level workshops were conducted for selected students. After the state level workshop, 50 students were given the opportunity to visit the National School of Drama, New Delhi, to meet and interact with teachers and students.

In the year 2013-14, *short film* was taken as the art form for specialised training. The preliminary selections of short films prepared by students were screened by the Kerala State Chalachithra Academy. A five-day residential training on film-making was conducted in association with Sacred Heart School of Communication at Kochi where legends in the Malayalam film industry interacted with the students. Thereafter, a four-day Film Appreciation workshop was conducted for the selected students at the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune.

In the year 2014-15, *design* was taken as the art form for specialised training. Students who have an aptitude in the field of designing were given a five-day state-level training. Next, a five-day workshop on Introduction to Designing was conducted for them at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

In the year 2015-16 *creative writing* was selected as a specialised subject for detailed training. A four-day residential

camp on Media and Creative Writing was conducted in association with Kerala Media Academy at Ashir Bhavan, Ernakulum, where established professionals in media interacted with the students. Following which a five-day Media and Information workshop was conducted for selected students at the Indian Institute of Mass communication and Journalism (IIMC), New Delhi.

In the year 2016-17, *fashion technology* with special reference to apparel designing was taken up as a special programme. Students who have aptitude for fabric designing were selected from each school. The question paper to test the skill of the student was prepared by the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Kannur, and 40 students were selected throughout the state to attend the state camp held at NIFT, Kannur, for five days and thereafter the national camp at NIFT, Chennai.

For the year 2017-18, *new media and animation* has been selected as the special area of interest. The state level camp for selected students was conducted at TOONS Academy, Thiruvananthapuram.

### **Other Services of the Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell**

Similar to Career Guidance units, *Souhruda Clubs* exist in a majority of schools. Maintaining good physical and mental health, development of life skills and providing counselling services are the major activities of *Souhruda clubs*. The

Additional Skill Acquisition Program (ASAP) conducted by DHSE Kerala provides opportunities to students to develop their employability in association with National Skill Development Corporation. Selected students are equipped with skills for Communication (100 hours), Information Technology (80 hours) and skills for selected areas of Industry and Service Sectors (120 hours in courses relating to any one of 83 skills).

### **Conclusion**

The world is changing rapidly. Today's excellence may not have any relevance for tomorrow's careers! The efforts of the DHSE through its Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling Cell have been outlined above. While most of them provide educational and career guidance to all students who enrol in higher secondary education in Kerala, some programmes are highly specific and selective in nature. Although a direct causal effect cannot be claimed, since these initiatives have come into place, there are visible positive changes such as an increase in the number of students from Kerala aspiring to enter and actually entering national level institutions. The increase of interest in a wider range of educational and career options could also be an indication of how the career guidance interventions are influencing career decisions. The long-term goal is a transition from complete literacy to complete employment which in the long run would contribute to an improvement of human development indicators.

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#### **About the author**

Jyothis Paul P is a Research Scholar in Education, Kannur University in Kerala. He is a higher secondary school teacher in Physics with 18 years of experience. He has successfully completed postgraduate qualifications in Physics, Psychology, Sociology, Education and Management. He serves as the Educational District Convenor for Career Guidance and Adolescent Counselling under the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Kerala. He is a certified national trainer of the Junior Chamber International and a certified JIVA Career Counsellor. As a resource person he conducts training programmes for teachers, parents, professionals and students.

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