

PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICE SYSTEM IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

By the end of the 20th century, a new institution of public education had been established in Hungary. The aim of this institution has become to identify and provide care for children and pupils with various integration, learning and behavioural problems, and later for particularly talented children. The support provided by these organisations are targeted at children, as well as parents, teachers and institutions. The specialised educational services include diagnostic, therapeutic, counselling and coordinating activities for the target population. Although it is part of the public education system, it differs prominently from other educational institutions, such as kindergartens and schools, in terms of its organisation, structure, pedagogical methods and support system. It has a specific set of objectives and tasks, carried out by teachers with a particular expertise (Mile 2019). The current study presents the unique Hungarian pedagogical assistance services.

Keywords: pedagogical assistance services, organization, professional features, service development

Introduction

The recent organisational structure was created in 2013. In that year, Decree No 15/2013 (II. 26.) EMMI on Pedagogical Assistance Service Institutions (hereinafter: the Decree) was passed into law. Following the approved legislation the entire pedagogical assistance service system was reorganised. Before 2013, the support system had operated as a variety of institutional forms and structures. There had been up to 4 to 5 different types of institutions (e.g. pedagogical assistance service institutions, crèches, kindergartens, schools, EGYMI¹, etc.).

This diversity had also been reflected by the maintenance of the institutions. Municipalities (county, municipal), maintenance associations, higher education institutions, churches, foundations, etc. had also been allowed to maintain pedagogical assistance service institutions. It had resulted in a complex, opaque structure, with overlapping responsibilities. Due to the uneven geographical distribution of service, there had been overlaps in some places, while in others there had been territorial gaps. As a result, children in care and their parents had been forced to seek assistance far from their place of residence. The operational area had not been clear either. The quality of care had been weakened by the lack of definition in roles, responsibilities and competencies, as well as by the varying professional quality of the mostly isolated operation of services. Care was less professionally controlled.

¹ EGYMI = APEMI -Adapted physical and conductive education methodological institution

Reorganization, renewing activity system

In 2013, the above-mentioned reorganisation merged the previous, separately operating pedagogical assistance service institutions, member institutions and tasks into one unified pedagogical assistance service institution in each county and the capital. Additionally, teachers working outside the pedagogical assistance service institutions but performing these professional activities had their employment transferred to said institutions. The concept of the reorganisation aimed to establish the most complete provision of public services possible, with unified management, unified procedures, professional protocols, and an integrated IT monitoring system. Further arguments in favour of the reorganization had been to provide the services in a complex manner through a sole entity – a sole institutional structure under professional control – rather than divided, considering a child or pupil may require more than one type of care. Apart from the pedagogical assistance service institutions - maintained by the school district centres -, the following institutions may also provide pedagogical assistance services duties

- regarding one or more pedagogical assistance service duties: pedagogical assistance service institutions and adapted physical and conductive education methodological institutions maintained by a public higher education institution,
- or regarding one or more pedagogical assistance service duties with the exception of the professional activities of the expert committee: pedagogical assistance services and adapted physical and conductive education methodological institutions maintained by legally recognized religious communities, religious organisations or other non-state, non-governmental educational bodies holding a contract with the Minister responsible for public education.

In some counties, the responsible school district centres were not able to fill the status limits set by the Decree, so it was necessary for objective and professional reasons to involve institutions controlled by non-state management in the provision of pedagogical assistance services in some school district centres. Thus, a total of 15 non-state institutions were involved nationwide, and a further 3 institutions maintained by universities are providing professional services "in their own right". According to the last comprehensive statistical database released (October 2020), 93% of children and pupils in need of pedagogical assistance services received care from the county pedagogical assistance service institutions, while the remaining 7% received care from the 18 institutions not maintained by a school district centres.

Pedagogical assistance services

As its name suggests, the work of the pedagogical assistance services is of a service nature, aiming to provide optimal support to those in need of care through a preventive and interdisciplinary approach (Mosányi 2017). The wide age range of the professional service allows for pedagogical accompaniment up to adulthood, following unified protocols. The provision of care is free and primarily voluntary, although there are particular services that parents or guardians are legally obliged

to utilize in some instances, based on the principle of the best interests of the child. The Decree, which describes in detail the activities of the service, defines 9 service duties.

Special educational consulting, early development and care (early intervention and prevention, early childhood education and care)

Special educational consulting, early development and care (hereinafter: early development) may be recommended by a health visitor or paediatrician or initiated by the parents themselves if they feel that their child is developing atypically. Eligibility for this care is recommended by the expert committee. The purpose of early development is to promote the development of children aged 0 to 6 years, to strengthen the families' competencies and to support the social inclusion of the child and the family. The activities of early development include complex special educational development, counselling, the development of social, communicational and language skills, the development of movement and psychological support. Once a child has reached the age of three, they may participate in early childhood development only if they are unable to participate in pre-school education because of a disability. The professionals involved in early intervention are: special needs teacher, psychologist, physiotherapist and specialist doctor.

Expert activity (expert committee)

Within the framework of the expert activity, the expert committee of the institution examines the child or pupil from complex psychological, pedagogical/special educational and - if the possibility of special educational needs is present - medical perspectives. The expert opinion from these assessments:

- determines eligibility for early intervention,
- identifies or excludes the presence of integration, learning and behavioural difficulties
- or identifies or excludes the presence of special educational needs.

Expert activity is present in three forms based on the target group, task and operational area. The diagnostic activity of the *district expert committees* is mainly aimed at children and pupils over three years of age. Their main duty is to identify and exclude the presence of integration, learning and behavioural difficulties. If the examination reveals the possibility of special educational needs, the committee forwards the examination file of the child or pupil to the county expert committee.

The *competent county expert committee* executes further examinations to confirm or exclude the presence of special educational needs and make recommendations regarding the type, form and place of care. The guardians of children under the age of three may apply directly to the county expert committee in the event of suspected atypical development. In the case of pupils with special educational needs, an expert opinion may also be provided with the purpose of exemption from the obligation to perform community service, which is a condition of receiving the school leaving certificate. Expert opinions may also apply with the purpose of extending compulsory schooling.

In 2013 beside the district and county expert committees, nationwide committees were also operating. The national expert committees were responsible for the assessment or exclusion of the presence of physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments and speech impairments, with a national remit. Since 1 September 2019, all disabilities have been allowed to be assigned to the county pedagogical assistance services, if they had sufficient capacity. The former national expert committees of the Capital Pedagogical Assistance Service Institution (now known as county expert committees) executes the assessment of physical disabilities, visual and hearing disabilities and speech disabilities on a multi-county basis.

Based on the findings of the examinations, the expert committee suggests the type, form and place of care needed to treat children and pupils with special educational needs or with integration, learning and behavioural difficulties. Specialists involved in the work of the expert committee are: special needs teacher, psychologist, conductor, specialist doctor according to the type of special educational needs and/or child and adolescent psychiatrist, paediatrician and paediatric neurologist.

Educational counselling

Within the framework of educational counselling, the pedagogical assistance service provides pedagogical and psychological support, development supervision and therapeutic care for children and pupils. The counselling supports parenting, the pedagogical work of the teacher and, if necessary, helps the educational institutions and the family to maintain contact. The care is preceded by psychological and pedagogical, special educational examinations with the purpose of progress diagnosis. Educational counselling includes preventive activities: cooperation with the network of health visitors and paediatricians and provision of comprehensive intervention for mental health in the family during the child's early development. Specialists involved in educational counselling are: development teacher, special needs teacher, psychologist.

Speech therapy

Speech therapy services are designed to encourage and correct speech, treat language developmental delays, speech defects and language communication disorders, and to prevent the development of dyslexia, dysorthography, dysgraphia and dyscalculia through speech and language therapy sessions. All children at the ages of three and five undergo speech and language screening in Hungary. Speech and language therapy is organised on the basis of a detailed speech and language diagnostic examinations and a speech and language assessment. The specialist involved in the provision of this service is a speech therapist.

Further study and career counselling

The duties of career counselling for education choices is to professionally assess the student's competencies, learning abilities and orientation, and as a result recommend a school choice. In the light of the above, the target group for career counselling are primarily pupils moving on to different types of school, i.e. pupils in the final year of primary and secondary education. Although this population is indeed the most affected, the service offers guidance to a wider age range in order to facilitate well-considered and timely decisions. Operating within the same

institution allows counsellors to work closely with the professionals of the county expert committee, thus to effectively assist pupils with disabilities and special educational needs in their career choices. Further study and career counselling services provide pedagogical, psychological and health related information and publications to support career guidance activities in schools. Specialists involved are: psychologist and counselling teacher.

Conductive educational service

Conductive educational service is the only type of care that is available exclusively to children and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. Conductive educational service is responsible for the conductive education, development and care of children and pupils with central nervous system disorders.

Conductive education is based on the internationally renowned Pető method². It can be provided individually or in group sessions. Parents may also be involved in the developmental tasks. The professional involved in the provision of the activities is a conductor.

Adapted physical education

Adapted physical education in its present crystallized form can be considered as uniquely Hungarian. It has general, preventive and rehabilitative purposes. The general purposes are to preserve physical and mental health, treat health disorders, prevent deformities, develop essential physical abilities, develop the need for movement and improve motor skills. The preventive purposes are to prevent the development of pathological, physical and physiological deformities, while the rehabilitative purposes are to correct the deformities that have developed and restore the person to as full a state of health as possible by means of adapted physical education, sport and physical education.

The duty of adapted physical education is to provide the child or pupil with adapted physical education for special health purposes if the school doctor or specialist doctor's examination has recommended it. Where the necessary conditions are met, swimming shall be organised for pupils within the context of one classroom activity per week. Adapted physical education may be organised, on the basis of medical recommendations, in groups of 1 to 3, 4 to 8 or 9 to 16. Specialist involved in the provision of the activity is the adapted physical education teacher.

School and pre-school psychology service

The primary target group for the professional services mentioned so far has been the child or pupil. However, school psychology and pre-school psychology, which became a new service in 2013, focuses mostly on the professionals and the psychologists. This form of care in the pedagogical assistance services is mainly coordination.

² The method developed by András Pető breaks with the traditional view that neurological damage is irreversible. The basic idea is that the nervous system, despite its damage, has 'reserves', the possibility of building new connections that can be mobilised with the right guidance. This is why Pető called his method 'conductive', a Latin word meaning 'to lead' (Hári 1997).

The role of the coordinator in the service is to coordinate and support the work of the psychologists working in the educational establishments. As part of the service, the coordinator arranges screenings in nursery schools and schools, cooperates in psychological assessments and in communicating the results. They provide further individual counselling and advice to psychologists, teachers and parents. Specialist involved in this task is the psychologist.

Promotion of particularly talented children/pupils

Promotion of particularly talented children/pupils was another new service introduced in 2013. The service provides early talent recognition, talent identification and recommendations for inclusion in talent programmes. Similarly to the school and pre-school psychology service, the task of assisting particularly talented children and pupils is primarily a coordination activity in the pedagogical assistance services.

The talent coordinator liaises with the heads of talent workshops, teachers and institutions involved in talent management, organises self-awareness groups and forums and provides advice and support to parents when needed. The pedagogical assistance service pays particular attention to children with a 'double speciality', who have been identified as having special talents in addition to difficulties in integration, learning, behaviour or special educational needs. Specialists involved in the provision of this service are: psychologist, teacher, specialised in talent development.

Characteristics of the county organisation

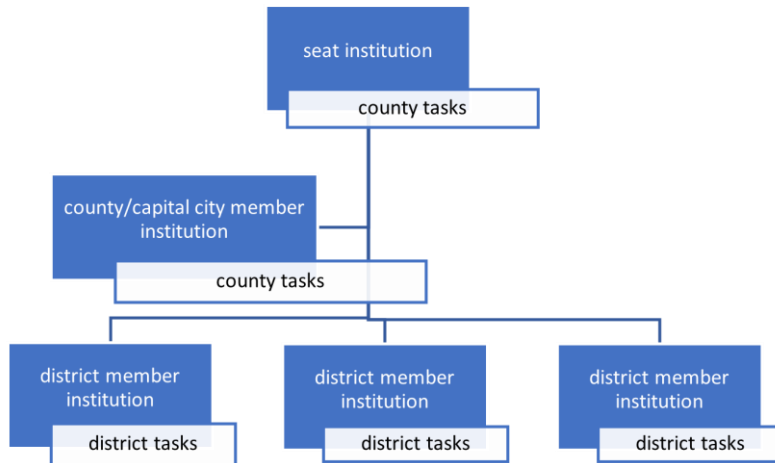
The transformation has brought radical changes in the operation of the pedagogical assistance services system. Whereas previously, different institutions had been set up for each type of task (e.g. educational counselling institute, speech therapy institute, further study and career counselling institute, etc.), the reorganisation created one institution per county, which is obliged to execute all tasks by law. The county organisational units are made up of district institutions and, in some cases, member institutions under county jurisdiction.

The seat institutions of the pedagogical assistance services are located in the county seats and in the capital. The seat institution is where the professional management and coordination of the services is carried out and where the workplace of the director-general, authorised for exercising the right of representation of the institution is located. It is also where the pedagogical assistance services are organised: the county expert committee and, usually, the further study and career counselling at county level.

Additionally to the above-mentioned tasks that are being carried out at county level, the district member institutions (at least one per district) are responsible for all the tasks of the pedagogical assistance services, with a scope of operation covering the given district. Currently, the 20 county (capital) pedagogical assistance service institutions have more than 300 sites (seat institutions, member institutions and sites altogether). Professionals of the pedagogical assistance services also work on additional sites (nurseries, kindergartens, schools). Thus, the

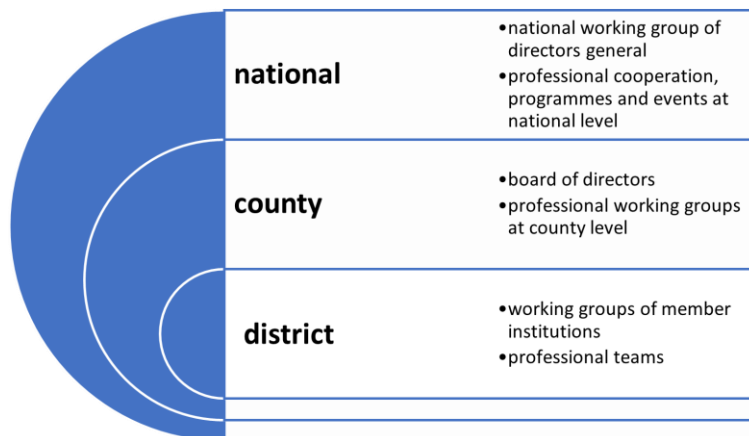
provision of pedagogical assistance services is covered nationally, at least de jure, but not yet fully covered de facto.

Figure 1. Organisation of pedagogical assistance service institutions



County institutions with the same or very similar organisational structures ensure transparency, uniformity and accessibility. In the event of a shortage of resources in one area, the flexibility of the county organisation allows neighbouring member institutions to support each other in terms of human resources. The competitive battles of the pre-reorganisation period are increasingly being replaced by cooperation.

Figure 2. Networking and horizontal learning in the pedagogical assistance service institutions



In 2013, simultaneously with the establishment of cooperation mechanisms, an intensive horizontal learning process between member institutions and teachers started. They have learned about each other's best practices, and standardised professional expectations and procedures, striving for unified professional quality. Networking has been initiated both horizontally and vertically. Professional cooperation at district level takes place within the framework of working groups of member institutions and professional teams set up for specific tasks. Coordination and professional coherence at county level is ensured by the institution's management board, the board of directors and the professional working groups are set up for each county and for each professional task. Nationwide networking and professional coherence is ensured by a working group of county directors general.

In summary, the mosaic-like care that had existed before 2013 evolved into a complex, holistic type of institution, both organisationally and professionally, in which the areas of service fit together perfectly.

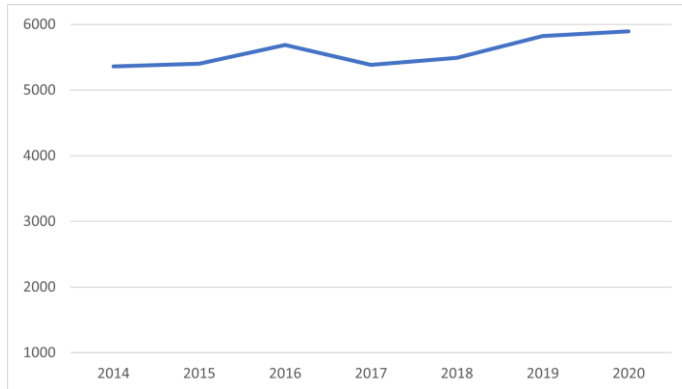
Human resources, number of care recipients

The human resource base of the pedagogical assistance services is made up of a wide range of professionals with diverse qualifications. The teaching staff includes special needs teachers, speech therapists, development teachers, conductors, psychologists, counselling teachers, teachers specialised in talent development and adapted physical education teachers. Professionals working in the pedagogical assistance services must also have a higher professional qualification as a teacher or psychologist. The Decree also set a minimum number of professionals per county and per service activities. This was an improvement on the opaque practice of the previous years, as it increased the number of positions. This has created the possibility to recruit more professionals and fill those positions, however, this is a lengthy process and is taking place at a different pace in each county. What is clear is that the number of professionals in the service has been steadily increasing since 2014, but has not yet reached an optimal level.

Part of the non-teaching staff are directly involved in the professional service (e.g. specialist doctor, physiotherapist, assistant), while others provide the administrative and infrastructural background for the professional activity (e.g. administrator, technical staff). The Decree also sets a minimum number for non-teaching posts by county.

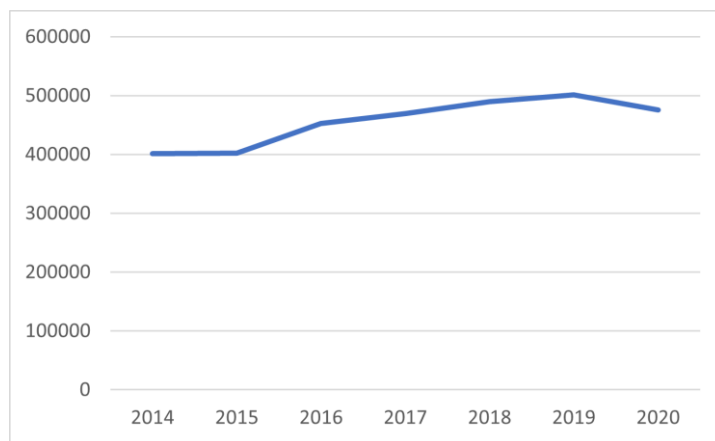
With the renewal and expansion of the pedagogical assistance service system, the number of children and pupils in care has also started to increase. Since the restructuring of the pedagogical assistance services took place in 2013 (during the school year), the first validated headcount data of children and pupils in care was received in October 2014.

Figure 3. Headcount data of teachers employed in pedagogical assistance services (2014-2020)



Source: KIR STAT

Figure 4. Headcount data of care recipients (2014-2020)



Source: KIR STAT

As shown in *Figure 4*, in the years following the restructuring of the care system, the number of care recipients has fluctuated between approximately 400,000 and 500,000 at national level. Owing to the renewal of services that have been built, we

saw a steady increase since the 2014 statistics, although the 2020 statistics showed a downturn in the number of care recipients. This year, however, there is only an apparent decrease in the number of care recipients, as some expert committee's examinations have become part of the official procedures and are therefore no longer reported in the public education statistics but in the authoritative statistics. There are significant differences between the number of care recipients of the different county institutions, depending on the size and population data of their operational area.

Professional innovations, service developments

Between 2012 and 2015, the TÁMOP³ 3.4.2.B flagship project served the evolution of the professional service activities and institutions. The budget for the implementation was HUF 2.3 billion. Following a detailed situation assessment (Bacsó et al 2013), general and professional protocols were developed for all professional service duties. The collection of best practices has started and a monitoring and evaluation system has been developed. In the framework of the expansion of the tools for professional pedagogical support, diagnostic tools were standardised and the development of therapeutic tools were carried out. The flagship project also involved the creation of an integrated IT monitoring system.

Notwithstanding, the restructuring came with a number of professional challenges, such as the need to delimit and clarify the institutional and professional competencies of adapted physical education and early development, and the professional competencies of speech therapy. Several working groups were active on these issues between 2014 and 2017, involving professionals and governmental agents.

In the next EU development program (Széchenyi 2020), several projects (no longer exclusively addressed, but shared with special education activities) have been directed at pedagogical assistance service institutions or activities:

- EFOP⁴-3.1.6: "Strengthening the role of public education in creating opportunities." The project aimed to support the developmental education of children with severe and multiple disabilities, the provision of pedagogical assistance services and the activities of a mobile network of special needs teachers.
- EFOP-4.1.6: "Strengthening the supportive role of public education." The project aimed at improving the infrastructure of institutions for the developmental education of children with severe and multiple disabilities and for the provision of pedagogical assistance services.
- EFOP-3.2.5: "Career guidance, with a focus on the development of MTMI⁵ skills and competencies in the public education system."
- EFOP-3.2.13: "Comprehensive establishment and development of a professional methodology for career guidance in primary and secondary

³ TÁMOP = SROP - Social Renewal Operational Programme

⁴ EFOP = HRDOP - Human Resources Development Operational Programme

⁵ MTMI = MSEC - Mathematics, Science, Engineering and Computer Science

schools, with a focus on supporting career guidance in MTMI skills and competencies"

- EFOP-1.9.5: "Cross-sectoral development of early childhood intervention."

The projects included the purchase of diagnostic and development supporting tools, IT development, creation of methodological materials, support for training, parenting support and sensitisation programmes as well as infrastructural improvements in the pedagogical assistance service institutions.

Summary

The system of pedagogical assistance services in Hungary has undergone significant changes over the last decade. The restructuring and renewal have led to the emergence of unified institutions with a clear profile, which - if they have a sufficient number of professionals - can provide full territorial coverage of all professional services. For the children and pupils, this means that they can receive additional educational services close to their place of residence, regardless of the type of pedagogical assistance service they need. The process of diagnosis, therapy, counselling or coordination in the pedagogical assistance service institution is not carried out individually and independently, but by a team of professionals working in close and constant contact with each other.

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PEDAGÓGIAI SZAKSZOLGÁLATI ELLÁTÓRENDSZER MAGYARORSZÁGON

MILE ANIKÓ – KISS LÁSZLÓ

Magyarországon a XX. század végén egy új köznevelési intézmény jött létre azzal a céllal, hogy a különböző tanulási, magatartási, beilleszkedési problémákkal küzdő, illetve később a kiemelten tehetséges gyermekek, tanulók felismerését, ellátását segítse. A szervezetek által nyújtott támogatás egyaránt irányulhat gyermekekre, szülőkre, pedagógusokra és intézményekre. Maga a pedagógiai szakszolgálat az érintett populációkra vonatkozóan diagnosztikai, terápiás, tanácsadói és koordinátori tevékenységeket foglal magába. Bár az intézmény a köznevelési intézményrendszer része, mind szervezeti formáját, struktúráját tekintve, mind a pedagógiai munka, illetve támogató jelleg szempontjából markánsan különbözik a nevelési - oktatási intézményektől, az óvodáktól és iskoláktól. Speciális cél-és feladatrendszerrel rendelkezik, amelyet különleges szakértelemmel rendelkező pedagógusok végeznek (Mile 2019). Jelen tanulmány a nemzetközi szinten egyedülálló formában működő hazai pedagógiai szakszolgálati ellátórendszert mutatja be.

Kulcsszavak: pedagógiai szakszolgálat, szervezet, szakmai jellemzők, szolgáltatás-fejlesztés