

CH-Q SYSTEM

From Valuation to Validation of Competencies

Current situation in Switzerland, Luxembourg, Austria and Czech Republic
Grundtvig learning partnership 2012-2014



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Grundtvig Learning Partnerships – Project 2012-2014
CH-Q - System - From valuation to validation of Competencies (CH-Q-SVVC)

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4th project meeting in Linz (30th of September 2014)

1. Introduction

The partnership "CH-Q-System - From valuation to Validation of Competencies" was a Grundtvig project ran by 4 partner organisations from Austria, Czech Republic, Luxembourg and Switzerland in 2012-2014.

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies (CH-Q System) is integrated in an overarching open and flexible framework of solution oriented learning processes promoting sustainable career and life planning. The approach is specifically directed to a combination of valuation of formal and informal learning and validation. It is centred on identification, assessment and recognition of skills and competencies in different areas of life. These include among others achievements in the family, in volunteer work, in civic activities. It was introduced in 1999 in Switzerland.

The particular strength of the CH-Q System is the concept for training and career guidance. It is modular by design and integrated in a system of certification and accreditation. It implies the awarding of certificates on three levels (users and professional trainers/consultants). The implementation of the methods, processes, procedures in education, training and in the socio-economic field is the responsibility of the providers. They ensure the adaption and application according to the quality requirements and in line with their particular needs.

The programs and counselling/guidance services offered by them are thus designed for a broad range of users irrespective of their personal background, educational level, occupation or social status. This consistent target-group orientation constitutes among others a strong factor as well in social integration as in citizenship and it contributes to the equality of opportunity.

The main objective of the project was to explore the situation in partner countries with the focus on validation systems, its meaning for individuals as well as for institutions within national qualification frameworks. Furthermore, to find out how the methodology developed by CH-Q System fits them. To that purpose the project partners met different stakeholders to identify examples of good practice concerning links between valuation and recognition/validation. The project led to the conviction that a common roof on European level of partner organisations and other like-minded organisations should be established to support competency-oriented lifelong learning and sustainable career planning.

In this publication, you can find the description what is the current stage of valuation and validation of competences in four countries as seen by the projects partners, examples of good practice and common conclusions made by partner representatives during the project.



*Conference
From Valuation to Validation
of Competencies in Prague
(20th of January 2014)*

2. Switzerland (The Association CH-Q - Swiss Qualification Program for Career Development)

Valuation and validation of non formal and informal learning - competence-based policies and approaches to benefit individuals and institutions

Valuation and Validation of informal and non-formal learning is a major issue of common understanding in the empowerment of individuals' process. Building bridges from the valuation of individual learning processes to the validation of its outcomes presupposes both the will to establish adequate/appropriate structures and frameworks and the cooperation of bottom up and top down stakeholders to the benefit of learners and applicants. This includes exploring ways how to link existing developments with the needs to carry out necessary improvements. The empowerment of individuals faced to increasing changes in social and economic systems remains a main focus of these arrangements.

Since the adoption of the Federal action vocational and professional education and training of 2002, Switzerland has opened the doors to a combination of both recognition of competencies and qualifications¹. The validation procedure in Switzerland is standardized and defined at a national level by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). It ensures a strong link between the formal vocational qualifications system and the individual pathways through learning and work experience. Validation can take into account any kind of learning. No restriction is made neither on how nor where candidates have acquired their competences. However, the major part of the competences that are assessed and recognised in the course of validation procedures stems from work experience. A smaller part is based on activities carried out as voluntary or honorary activities or additional jobs. It is the responsibility of the professional organisations that supervise the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and issue formal diplomas to ensure adequate links between the formal system and the labour market. To this respect they have to carry out tasks that are determined by the Federal action vocational and professional education and training, among them the development of competence or qualification profiles in their specific field.

¹ Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation SBFI (Hrsg) (2002). *Bundesgesetz über die Berufsbildung (BBG)*. Bern

Key legislation

The key provisions of the validation procedure in the Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training include:

Art. 9 Section 2 - Experiential learning and vocational or general skills that were acquired outside the formal education and training system are accredited appropriately.

Art. 17 Sec. 5 - Basic VET can also be achieved through non-formalised learning; this process leads to a qualification procedure.

Art. 33 - Professional qualifications are assessed through a final exam, a combination of tests or other forms of qualification procedures that are accredited by the Federal Office (OPET).

Development and implementation of measures

In 2004 the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) launched the national platform of "Validation of Learning". The SERI platform included important stakeholders on all levels: authorities and executive bodies, social partners (employers, trade unions), organisations in education and vocational training, specialists and experts. Together they initiated different projects on a cantonal level. The Association CH-Q, acting as a stakeholder responsible for the quality and control in the area of self-evaluation of individual management of competencies, was a member of this platform.

In 2007 the platform-members adopted the National Guidelines on „Validation of Learning“ issued by the SERI². Although they were restricted to the basic vocational training, Higher Education institutions used them equally as basis for developing validation approaches ("Equivalence assessment for the acquisition of the Federal Professional Education and Training (PET) Diploma in Adult Education and Training" - tertiary level of the type B, referred to in Switzerland as professional education and training PET - and the modular train-the-trainer system run by the national umbrella organisation Swiss Federation for Adult Learning SFAL/SVEB). In 2008 decision policy makers within the platform, considering that its main goals were fulfilled, decided to dissolve it.

² Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation SBFI. (2007). (ed). *Validierung von Bildungsleistungen – Nationaler Leitfaden Berufliche Grundbildung*. Bern.

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies Origins

The CH-Q System of Managing Competencies emerged from a national initiative in education taken in the early 1990s. It led to a four year project, supported by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). The main targets of the initiative were: flexibility of the educational system and equivalence of formal and informal learning. In that context, a specific approach was at stake that allowed the identifying, assessing and recognizing of skills and competencies.

The Association CH-Q — Swiss Qualification Program for Career Development was subsequently set up in 1999 as a non-profit umbrella organisation in order to manage, expand and promote the development and implementation of such an approach. The quality assurance approach required a separation of roles. Thus the Association CH-Q decided not to act as a provider but to concentrate on exercising strategic, political, and structural functions. In the pursuit of its objectives, the Association CH-Q could and still can count on direct or indirect support from authorities, associations and institutions on national and regional levels.

According to a statement in the National Guidelines on „Validation of Learning” issued by the SERI, the long-term action of the Association CH-Q has helped - together with two other umbrella organisations - to prepare the ground towards a rapid implementation of the Validation of Prior Learning in Switzerland. This early involvement in processes and procedures of formal and informal learning and the continuous development of the System of Managing Competencies, have then led the Association CH-Q to participate in various VPL-projects on national and international levels.

Goals

The Association CH-Q Swiss Qualification Program for Career Development works together with partners to develop and establish solutions for the management of competencies on a individual level. They create the conditions for specific career development: they enable young people and adults to adapt to a changing education, training and socio-economic system at their own initiative, they increase their professional flexibility and mobility; they ensure sustainability in lifelong learning. The central focus is to take into account existing strengths, and to convert them into qualifications.

One of the most important tasks is to keep sight of the complexity of these competence based objectives. It is about recognition of performances and achievements in different areas of life. This includes achievements in the family, in volunteer work, in civic activities. The Association CH-Q is especially involved in giving these objectives a better chance in education at each stage and in the workplace.

To achieve these goals and to create a dynamic culture of competence, the Association CH-Q develops fundaments, strategies and frameworks. The CH-Q label stands for leading-edge quality—both in Switzerland and abroad.

Concept for training and career guidance

The implementation of the system in education, training and in the socio-economic field is in the responsibility of the providers. They ensure the adaption and application of the methods, processes, procedures on an operational level in line with their particular needs.

The essential element of assuring the quality is the qualification of the trainers and counsellors. The training program is modular by design and integrated in the system of certification and accreditation. It implies the awarding of certificates on three levels (users and professional trainers/consultants) and of an additional qualification on level four.

It includes in a second step the recognition of the programs developed by certified trainers/counsellors on level three which leads to acquiring the label CH-Q.

Costs per beneficiary

The costs are determined by the provider. They generally are adapted to the price of the market. Either the beneficiary pays the fee himself or the costs are covered by the employer.

Concept for quality assurance and control

The Commission of Qualification and Recognition is responsible for ensuring the quality of the training and for verifying the correctness of the programs developed by the providers. To this purpose they are controlling the acquired qualifications on level 1-3 and the evidence of quality of the programs developed for level 1 by the providers. Both of the procedures are based on written documents. These are first evaluated by especially assigned experts and then validated by the members of the Commission.

Partner profile:

Gesellschaft CH-Q - Schweizerisches Qualifikationsprogramm zur Berufslaufbahn (The Association CH-Q - Swiss Qualification Program for Career Development) is established since 1999 as a non-profit umbrella organization dedicated, on a national scale, to strengthening links between lifelong learning and the individual management of competencies (CH-Q System of Managing Competencies). The Association CH-Q is not a provider, it is responsible for political, strategic and structural functions of the system. The pursuit of its objectives is characterized by the will to contribute to a dynamic culture of competence. The Association CH-Q can count on direct or indirect support from authorities, associations and institutions at the national and regional level.

Web site: www.ch-q.ch



Conference From Valuation to Validation of Competencies in Prague (20th of January 2014)

3. Luxembourg (Zarabina)

In Luxembourg, jobseekers have access to competency-oriented career counselling with financial support. Under an agreement with the Ministry of Education and Labour in Luxembourg, Zarabina provides competency-oriented career counselling to men and women, who have signed up with the labour exchange. The competency-oriented career planning - pursuant to the CH-Q System - is a preventive approach and helps people to remain (more) employable and to take charge of their development in their professional life (cf. GAB Evaluation Munich 2004 on the application of the CH-Q System at Zarabina asbl). All working citizens are members and have access to competency-oriented career counselling free of charge.

The question was raised as to whether the CH-Q competency management procedure should be considered appropriate for giving equal weight during validation to occupational, social and methodical skills acquired outside the normal educational courses. In Luxemburg the equivalent recognition of non-formally and formally acquired competencies is still in the fledging stage.

The professionalization of career counselling has an essential role to play. Many European countries use the CEDEFOP Study 2010 as a frame of reference for life-long learning. This states that legal regulations and strategies must be created in order to establish an integrated system for career counselling. Career counselling should begin in school, be supported during transition phases and be usable throughout one's entire working life. In Luxembourg, we are still miles away from such an integrated approach. Moreover, the national validation policy is still in the fledging stage.

The discussions under the Grundtvig project confirm our position. Career planning needs a standardised quality framework and professionally organised counselling models.

Resource-oriented as well as life-long career counselling as a basis for life-long learning should be at the centre of our national policy on education, the labour market and social strategy. A national framework for life-long counselling that establishes both the competency framework for qualified personnel and the quality framework for education and counselling offers is needed. Competency-oriented career counselling pursuant to the CH-Q System has proven to be a sustainable model (cf. GAB Evaluation 2004). It buttresses the perceptions of personal and occupational self-fulfilment, a fairer society and sustainable employability.

Partner profile:

Since 1995 **ZARABINA asbl.** has been the first choice for career change training an advice. Our commitment to sustainability and equality allows us to implement our ideas successfully. We focus on customized employment strategies by consistently and effectively integrating the demands of reality with the personal goals of our clients. Our core competencies are: programs for active and lifelong career development; initiatives for the recognition of professional and non-professional skills and crucial projects in the fields of vocational training, work and careers.

Today ZARABINA employs 14 staff who, rather than continue to rely on "proven concepts", constantly strive to offer new solutions for an ever changing job market. The internal structures of ZARABINA, the processes, behaviour and leadership principles - simplicity, transparency and learning - reflect our professional commitment. Personal responsibility, trust and commitment are the standards applied to all levels of learning and cooperation.

Besides the services of professional orientation and training, the management of competences according to the CH-Q System is the mostly required service. To-date our association is the only information centre in Luxembourg acting in this field and who is certified by the CH-Q quality label.

Since about 10 years in a cross-sectoral effort, ZARABINA asbl. has implemented the CH-Q System into its entire services. All the 7 professionals of our team have an adequate formation in this respect. Today ZARABINA asbl. disposes of both, broad know-how but also a very detailed and profound expertise in the areas of concept development and transfer to different target groups. The standards and the CH-Q System ever being duly considered, we have been experimenting with a lot of learning-settings.

Web site: www.zarabina.lu



Final meeting of the partnership in Zurich (12th of February 2014)

4. Austria (Volkshochschule - Stadtbibliothek Linz)

Legal situation, management and validation of competencies

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is not carried out systematically, nor is it done so by the majority of EU-countries. However, during the last two years an increased interest has been noted in the fields of science, vocational training and adult education. This interest on the one hand is based on the national activities to set up a national qualification frame (NQR) and on the other hand on the recommendations of the European Council of 20th December 2012 to validate non-formal and informal learning.

These activities are mainly financed by the Austrian Ministry of Education (BMBF).

At a conference organized by this ministry on 10th April 2014 in Linz (Open the chances - on the way to validate non-formal and informal learning) the principal Austrian stakeholders involved in these processes were present. This clearly demonstrated the increasing interest in this subject. It also became apparent that the discussion, which was on a very high level, was mainly theory driven, but did not relate to the actual practical work of validation. The practical examples which were given, were only dealing with short term projects or presentations of possible future projects.

Furthermore the target for this conference was people who have limited or no access to formal education. This, therefore, reduced the discussion to this particular group, which has not yet being clearly defined in detail, however it is in line with the requirements of the European Council. For this reason only few representatives from the universities and hardly any from the Austrian Social Partners were taking part. By maintaining the focus on these disadvantaged groups, it might be that the concept of validation will primarily be used for these groups only. It also might be difficult to use this term later for vocational training and university education.

Significant Austrian stakeholders in the discussion about validation

One principal player in this discussion is the Ministry of Education (BMBF). It coordinates the national and European education concepts and provides funds and research projects. The responsible

department is the Department for Adult Education. Responsible person: Ms Doris Wyskitensky, (www.bmukk.gv.at)

The following two organizations are engaged and financed by the ministry.

Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung (ÖIBF). Responsible Person: Mr. Peter Schlögl (www.oeibf.at)

Österreichischer Austauschdienst (öead), which runs the national agency for lifelong learning and coordinates the activities for the NQR. Responsible for validation and NQR : Mr. Udo Bachmayr and Mr. Karl Andrew Müllner (www.lebenslangeslernen.at)

At the university level the Donau University Krems is relevant. Prof. Gudrun Biffl is the expert (www.donau-uni.ac.at)

Bottom up there are many organisations all over Austria, who coach persons with little formal education and also migrants.

One of them to be specially mentioned is „migrare“, an organisation in Upper Austria, which uses the portfolio program of the CH-Q System and runs the new AST (Anerkennungsstelle Oberösterreich). This is guidance to nostrification. Person responsible: Mr. Mümtaz Karakurt (www.migrare.at)

A very important organisation in this field is the Arbeiterkammer Oberösterreich, the Upper-Austrian Chamber of Labour, which is involved in the project DKW. Head of the department education and culture: Ms. Bernadette Hauer (www.arbeiterkammer-ooe.at)

Examples of good practice

These include the following institutions, already introduced in our project.

A. Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich (WbA)

The WbA has already set up a very well functioning system for validation. So far more than 1000 persons have been certified or got their diploma in adult education. It is financed and supported by the Ministry of Education and has been completely recognized by and integrated in the Austrian Adult Education sector. Head of WbA: Ms. Karin Reisinger (www.wba.at)

B. DKW – Du kannst was (You can do it!)

DKW is an extremely successful project which has been going on for four years. It is financed by the Upper-Austrian Provincial Government, run by the Upper-Austrian Social Partners and adult education organisations. Two other provinces (Salzburg and Burgenland) have also started DKW in the meantime. In this project qualified people without any formal certificates will be guided through the „right“ and official process of validation. This process leads finally to the official recognition of their competencies. DKW was the reason for a change in the Austrian „Berufsausbildungsgesetz – BAG (the law regulating vocational training). Equal ways to obtain valid certificates are now possible. Responsible person at VHS Linz: Ms. Renate Spitzbart (www.dukannstwas.at)

The future prospect for Austria concerning management and validation of competencies is very positive. Especially the subject of validation is widely discussed. However, there is still little participation by the social partners and universities. They are, nevertheless, the most important stakeholders in a successful process of validation. By creating so called „Anerkennungsstellen“ (Centres for officially recognising certificates) a big step forward was made last year.

The CH-Q System is recognised leader in the sector of quality-assured portfolio-management. About 200 portfolios a year are issued by CH-Q 1. Additionally there are regular train-the-trainer programs, so the CH-Q System could keep its prime position.

In the overview of the last ten years we can say that in Austria the managing of competencies in the „Volkshochschulen“ is mainly run by the CH-Q system. Programs for trainers have been implemented in the provinces of Styria, Salzburg, Burgenland, Upper Austria and also in Vienna. It is important to point out that the Volkshochschulen all over Austria are the most important organisations offering „general education“ for adults.

The perspective for such programs is very good because questions of validations are not only being publicly discussed very intensively, but also the Austrian Labour Offices use competence profiles for their clients, especially for women and migrants.

Partner profile:

The Volkshochschule Linz (abbr. VHS Linz) was founded as an adult education centre in 1947 and is now a public institution and part of Linz City Council. From the very beginning VHS Linz was offering trainings that were developed to improve the handling of everyday life, to broaden learners' personal horizon and to develop one's own creativity. Nowadays, VHS Linz offers more than 2100 courses that are attended by 24 500 participants each year. Above that around 290 public lectures are held every year that are highly frequented.

Web site: www.vhs.linz.at

5. Czech Republic

(Genderové informační centrum NORA)

In 2006, there was a law concerning proving and validating outcomes of prior learning (No 179/2006). This law covers: system of proving and validating outcomes of further education, qualification, qualification standard of partial qualifications, evaluation standard of partial qualifications, National Qualification Framework, rules for granting, lengthening and removing the authorisation for proving outcomes of further education, rights and obligations of participants of further education and operation of administrative bodies.

Proving that the physical person has the adequate capability is executed by an examination according to the qualification standard of the concrete partial qualification. Applicant for the examination can be any adult person 18+ who has the basis of education. Achievement of specialized capability is validated by an authorized body or committee of representatives of authorized bodies. Applicant succeeds with the examination if he fulfils requirements set by evaluation standards.

Question is if there is a place for recognition of an individual informal and non-formal prior learning, or if it is curriculum-based validation. Often, the validation is linked to a retraining.

In the frame of programmes for Youth, there was a program developed the online system Personal Competence Portfolio to validate the competencies acquired in non-formal education to be used mainly to qualified educators in working non-formal education. The project is now running under the National Institute for Further Education: <http://www-test.nidm.cz/okp2>, contact person: Daniela Havlíčková havlickova.d@nidv.cz

Since 2009, Euroguidance Centre in the Czech Republic has organized a set of trainings for career counsellors CH-Q – Competence management led by Dutch trainers. 2 of participants continued their certification under CH-Q System and they are now certified at all 3 levels. In 2012, they co-founded an organisation which objective is to transfer a CH-Q System to the Czech Republic – Centrum kompetencí, contact person: Silvie Pýchová silvie.pychova@gmail.com

Competence-based valuation and validation starts to be an attractive topic in the Czech Republic but it is still more a challenge than reality.

Partner profile:

Gender Information Centre Nora exists since 2004. Its mission is to promote gender problematic to the public audience and organization of lectures, trainings and cultural events with gender topic for adults. Its experts also provide their expertise to other institutions. NORA also publishes a bulletin FEMA for the target group of women. One of the main topics is equal opportunities at the labour market for men and women.

In this context NORA's external experts play a decisive role in transferring the CH-Q System to the Czech Republic: they are not only qualified and certified professionals in competence management but also co-founders of an NGO Centrum kompetencí.

Web site: www.gendernora.cz

6. Conclusion of the Partnership

All the countries involved in this partnership have already knowledge and experience with the fundamentals of the CH-Q System. But there is a difference on the level of practice and the recognition of outputs. This project helped to build common understanding about the main benefits of the CH-Q System for learners and providers.

Our conceptual orientation was confirmed: to sustain employability a holistic approach linking valuing processes of competence management to validation is needed. Competencies acquired through informal and non-formal learning and experience should therefore be appreciated and recognised on a par.

Competence management leading to a sustainable career planning should be accessible to everyone at any time. In view of the continuous changes and developments in work, employment and society, people are forced to constantly make new decisions. To be able to move in a flexible, competent and independent manner between education and the labour market, individuals need a high level competence-oriented professional support.

We were able to exchange relevant examples of good practice between the partners and at the same time identify different levels of implementation. The differences are mainly due to the way validation of non-formal and informal learning is realized in a country - this because of the missing bridge between

valuation and validation. The CH-Q System with its focus on valuing processes is providing fundamentals for closing this gap.

Our own conclusions are in line with the OECD Study of 2004: "Policy-makers should give priority to systems that promote the development of competencies for occupationally-oriented decision-making and the management of one's own career and which serve to provide high quality education and occupational information not based on vested interests. The measures in question should be adapted to the respective requirements, needs and circumstances of those seeking advice."

The project partners have agreed that competence-oriented career counselling is a preventive approach. It helps to strengthen social integration and active citizenship. The awareness about the notion of competences is rising throughout Europe. **But this does not necessarily imply the level of self-management of competences! A change of paradigm is needed! At stake is the building up of a competence culture in education and in the world of work. With this objective in mind both stakeholders and decision-makers alike are invited to build the indispensable common understanding and mutual trust.**

Zurich, May 2014