

**Good practice
in validation of learning outcomes**

Germany

**Qualification "Qualified metal processing
worker, specialising in construction
engineering"**



Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Germany. Qualification "Qualified metal processing worker, specialising in construction engineering"

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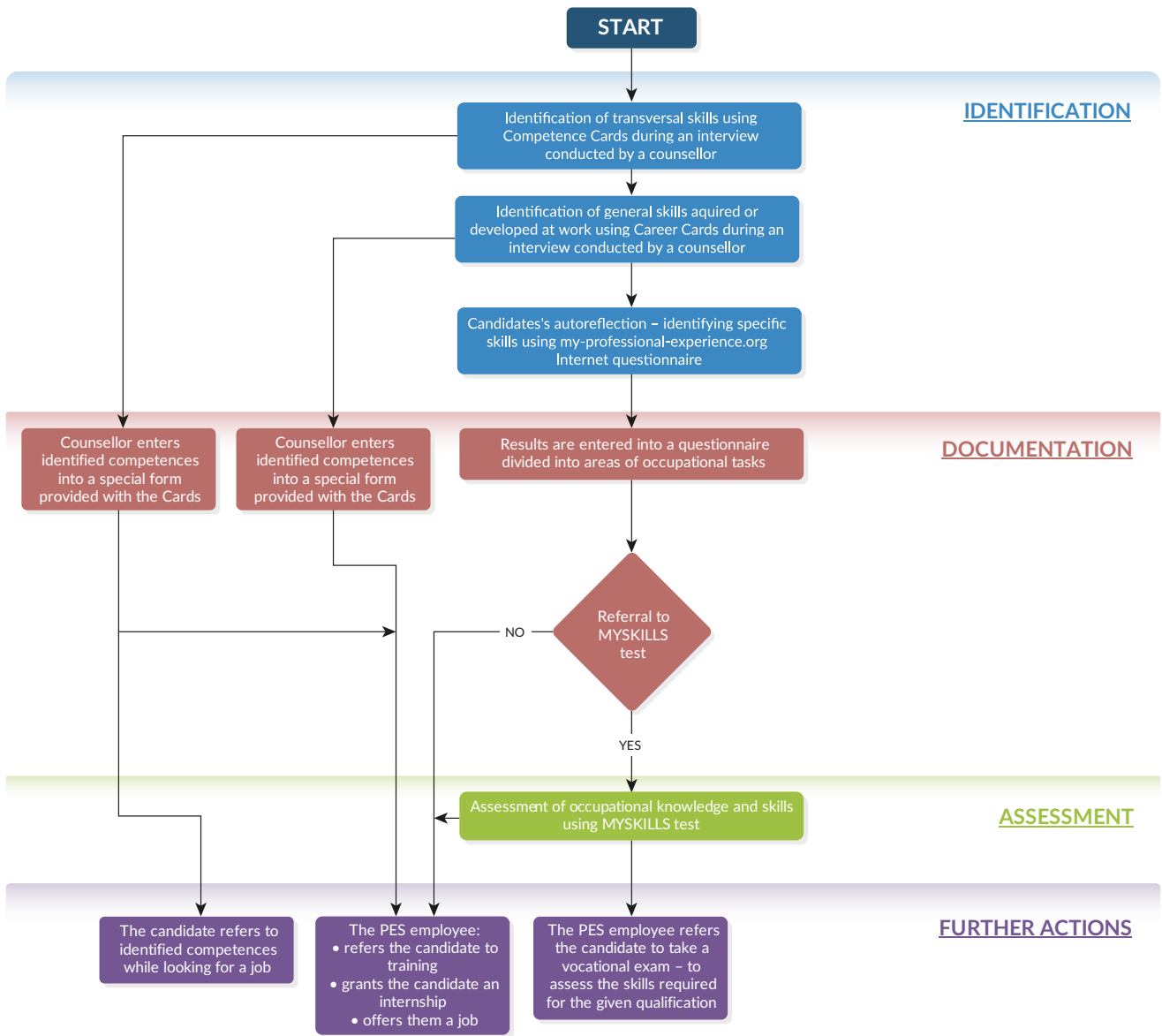
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1. Country, institution name

- Germany
- Intercultural Office of the Workers Welfare Organisation (AWO), Schleswig-Holstein branch (Arbeiterwohlfahrt Landesverband Schleswig-Holstein e.V.) and public employment agencies

2. Institution website

<https://www.awo-sh.de/>; <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/startseite>

3. Qualifications

Qualified metal processing worker, specialising in construction engineering (German Qualifications Framework level 3, European Qualifications Framework level 3)

Fachkraft für Metalltechnik in der Fachrichtung Konstruktionstechnik (Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen – DQR niveau 3, EQF 3)

4. Short description of the validation process

Comment

The following example of validation consists of three stages:

- **identification and documentation** of learning outcomes, conducted at the AWO Intercultural Office. This usually covers the candidate's knowledge, skills and the social competence relating to the job; however they may also relate to the competences required for a given qualification – such as in the case of the “Qualified metal processing worker” qualification;
- **examination of skills**, conducted in a branch office of the public employment agencies – **is not oriented towards the attainment of a qualification.**

The activities conducted by the AWO Intercultural Office are addressed to immigrants who plan to enter the German labour market and **who have no qualifications** acquired/awarded from that country. They are usually referred to AWO for validation by employees of public employment agencies.

This process usually includes the identification and documentation of **transversal** and practical skills connected with the job, supplemented with a self-assessment conducted by the candidate. Each of these activities is done using the proper tools:

- Competence Cards (transversal skills),
- Career Cards (professional experience and general practical skills relating to the job),
- my-professional-experience.org (self-assessment of specific professional skills).

It should be stressed that the above methods are used not only to analyse the skills of immigrants, but also to analyse the skills of German citizens too.

Further activities – conducted outside the AWO Intercultural Office – depend on the results of the identification and documentation of learning outcomes.

In Germany, 5 to 8 areas of professional tasks in each job have been specified. If a given person demonstrates experience in at least one of them, the AWO counsellor recommends that a public employment agency employee examine the candidate's skills using the MYSKILLS test. Its results indicate whether a given person is already able to participate in the German labour market. These are the basis for specifying the further activities of the employment services. However, they have no direct influence on the potential attainment of a qualification.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

A person who is interested in taking part in validation determines its objective and scope together with a counsellor employed at the AWO Intercultural Office. Then the counsellor identifies the candidate's transversal and professional skills using tools prepared by Bertelsmann Stiftung and records the results in special forms.

These tools complement each other and comply with the tools used by the employment services. They have been created in such a way that persons who do not speak German or have poor knowledge of this language can use them – the cards and the Internet questionnaire include many helpful drawings and simple expressions connected with professional activities, translated into several languages.

5.1. Identification and Documentation of Transversal Skills

Transversal skills are identified during an interview conducted by means of the Competence Cards.

Box 1. The Competence Cards

The set of competence cards consists of 7 elements containing 49 cards in total (each card relates to one of 49 identifiable transversal skills):

1. Cards presenting personal skills (19 cards),
2. Cards presenting social skills (10 cards),
3. Cards presenting key competences (for example, speaking foreign languages, IT competences – 20 cards),
4. Cards presenting interests (11 cards),
5. Additional cards (presenting additional information about the other cards, symbols demonstrating the level of proficiency in a given skill/competence),
6. Instruction manual,
7. Model form in which the results are recorded.

Each card contains brief information in eight languages (German, French, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi and Tigrinya (one of the languages in Ethiopia) and a picture. The reverse contains a detailed description of skills in a given language, revision questions and references to the other cards.

The candidate usually selects cards that represent his/her skills and then specifies the proficiency level in each of them using the +, ++ or +++ symbols. During the interview, the counsellor helps the candidate best match the result to his/her actual skills, explains, among others, the meaning of individual cards, prevents "overestimation" or "underestimation" of the proficiency level, and if in doubt asks questions presented on the reverse of the cards (for example: "You indicated having skills in academic work. When and where did you acquire this?").

The counsellor writes down the results in the form, which the person entering validation can later present to his/her possible employer or an employment agency.

The interview can last from 15 minutes to 2 hours.

5.2. Identification and Documentation of General Practical Skills on the Basis of Professional Experience

The next part of the interview with the candidate relates to his/her professional experience and general skills he/she has acquired or developed at work. They can be identified using the Career Cards.

Box 2. The Career Cards

The set of Career Cards consists of 5 elements in a total of 101 cards:

1. Cards concerning individual sectors (48 cards) – relate to all professional areas present in the German vocational education system,
2. Cards concerning various jobs (30 cards) – relate to 156 of 327 all jobs taught,
3. Additional cards:
 - presenting potential scenarios of the interview in which a given card (job) may be used,
 - symbols demonstrating:
 - proficiency level in a given competence,
 - duration of employment (less than a year, 1–5 years, above 5 years),
 - willingness to work in a given sector/job (☺ , ☺ ☺ , ☺ ☺ ☺)
 - information about the German system of professional education,
 - useful links to further information.
4. Instruction manual,
5. Model form in which the results are recorded.

Each sectoral card contains a picture showing persons doing the activities that are typical of the given job and a title relating to the given sector of the economy (for example health, construction) in eight languages (German, French, Russian, Arabian, Turkish, Farsi and Tigrinya – one of the languages in Ethiopia). The reverse contains information for the counsellor about e.g. individual trades in the sector, qualifications that may be attained or the possibility of enrolling in higher education.

Each professional card contains a picture relating to four main tasks from distinct areas of the occupational tasks (for example, a cook). The reverse contains information, such as typical employment opportunities and further education, as well as the 10 transversal skills most required for the given job (from the set of Competence Cards).

The counsellor starts by asking the candidate about his/her previous professional experience (the areas, sectors or trades in which the candidate worked) and about how the candidate assesses his/her proficiency in individual skills. The length of the experience may be specified at the same time (less than a year, one to five years, over five years). If the candidate's answers comply with at least one card from the set of the Career Cards, further discussion is held using this tool.

When significant professional experience can be identified (written down in a special form), the candidate begins identifying specific professional skills using the Internet questionnaire my-professional-experience.org.

5.3. Self-assessment of Specific Professional Skills

If the areas in which a given person demonstrates experience are known, specific skills can be identified. This is done using the my-professional-experience.org Internet questionnaire.

The questionnaire contains questions relating to 8 distinct jobs (it will be soon extended to include 30 jobs). For each job, competence models, which include 20 to 40 typical tasks conducted by employees and presented by means of photos, have been developed.

For each task, the candidate answers the question: "How often did i perform the given task?" and records: never (0 times), rarely (1–9 times), often (10–49 times) or very often (over 50 times) on the scale. The content of the questionnaire can be adapted by the counsellor so that it best refers to the interview held previously.

After filling out the questionnaire, the candidate obtains the results referring to specific professional tasks and their areas. The results can be used when applying for a job or for undertaking further activities with the public employment agency.

If experience in at least one of the areas of the professional tasks in each job (from 5 to 8) has been demonstrated in this way, the candidate is referred to the MYSKILLS test.

5.4. Initial Examination of Professional Skills

As mentioned above, the MYSKILLS test does not directly lead to the awarding of a qualification. Its results may, however, indicate that a candidate is ready to take a vocational exam (it is very probable that he/she will pass it) or he/she may be presented to a potential employer. The MYSKILLS test was prepared by scientists, consulted with experts and practitioners from various sectors and its reliability has been confirmed by research. For this reason it can be regarded as an initial examination of vocational skills.

The test is conducted in a local branch of the public employment agencies. Its objective is to assess the skills in 8 jobs. During the test, the candidate answers 20 questions concerning each of the areas of occupational tasks distinguished in a given job (their number ranges from 5 to 8).

Box 3. Structure of the MYSKILLS test

The sequence of activities in each MYSKILLS test is as follows:

1. The candidate watches a film or pictures presenting typical occupational tasks and tasks relating to given competences.
2. Then the candidate must answer detailed questions (for example, relating to specialist equipment or occupational health and safety) or perform a simple task (for example, indicate the correct sequence of actions in performing given activities).

The test can be conducted in German, Arabian, Farsi, Russian, Turkish and English.

6. Validation methods

Because of the target group for validation (immigrants lacking qualifications that are recognised in Germany), the employees of the AWO Intercultural Office use semi-structured interviews, during which they use the Competence Cards and Career Cards.

Moreover, the candidate performs a self-assessment of his/her learning outcomes using the my-professional-experience.org Internet questionnaire, whereas the employees of public employment agencies use the test and discuss its results during an interview with the candidate.

7. Validation results

The main result of validation conducted by the AWO Intercultural Office is the specification of the strengths and weaknesses of a given person. If he/she has demonstrated knowledge, skills and social competence in at least one area of professional tasks distinguished in the qualification, he/she can be referred to the MYSKILLS test.

Depending on the results of the MYSKILLS test, the public employment agency employee may:

- refer the person to training,

- grant the person an internship,
- offer the person a job.

The MYSKILLS test results may help an employer specify the tasks that the candidate can already perform or cannot perform yet.

Moreover, very good results of the MYSKILLS test in many areas of occupational tasks form the basis for the candidate to take a vocational exam, which is organised by authorised units (such as chambers of crafts, chambers of industry and commerce), to assess the skills required for the given qualification.

8. Human resources

Employees of the AWO Intercultural Office who identify and document learning outcomes (and act as counsellors) are graduates of education studies.

Moreover, it is useful for the employees of the AWO Office to have knowledge and skills in the following fields:

various cultures (in particular those of the majority of immigrants in Germany),

- counselling and guidance,
- identification and documentation of learning outcomes,
- foreign languages,
- use of Competence Cards.

Teamwork and communication skills are important too.

Employees of employment agencies who refer candidates to the MYSKILLS test should be acquainted with this tool and this knowledge is acquired during obligatory training and through access to additional materials. They should also demonstrate knowledge and skills in the field of counselling and guidance (they are usually graduates of employment agency studies).

The MYSKILLS test is conducted by experts from the Occupational Psychological Service, who are in most cases have a Master's degree in psychology.

9. Organizational and material conditions

To conduct validation, the material and organisational resources specified in the table below are needed.

Table 1. Organisational and material resources used in validation

Validation stage	Tool	Time needed	Material resources	Instruction
Identification	Competence Cards	from 15 minutes to 2 hours (depending on client's needs)	separate room, which makes it possible to create an atmosphere of trust the form to write down the results	two-page instructions combined with an instructional <u>film</u> (in English)

Identification and documentation	Career Cards	15-30 minutes	separate room, which makes it possible to create an atmosphere of trust the form to write down the results	two-page instructions, supplemented in the future with an instructional film
	my-professional-experience.org questionnaire	3-5 minutes per qualification and optionally 15-30 minutes for an additional interview	device with access to the Internet (for example computer, tablet)	instructional film
Examination of skills	MYSKILLS	4-5 hours per qualification and 2x 15-30 minutes for an interview	computer with access to the Internet in the Occupational Psychological Service of the local branch of the public employment agency	instructional film (in German)

The tools presented in the good practice and used for identification and documentation have been gaining popularity since their development. Presently, the sixth edition of the Competence Cards has been introduced. Over 10 000 sets have been printed and a further 3 500 have been downloaded from the file available on Bertelsmann Stiftung's site. They are also popular abroad – they have been translated into English and Italian so far. As of its activation in December 2017 to May 2018, the my-professional-experience.org site was visited by over 11 000 persons.

The MYSKILLS test was introduced in November 2017. It has been used ever since in 156 employment agencies – all those that have a branch of the Occupational Psychological Service.

10. Quality assurance

There are two levels of ensuring the quality of validation in the good practice described:

- institutional level (internal system of quality assurance at AWO);
- the quality of the tools developed (the use of the tools is included in the internal quality assurance process of a given institution, for example at AWO).

10.1. Internal Quality Assurance System

As far as the internal quality assurance system is concerned, the AWO Intercultural Office follows the principles applicable to the entire AWO Workers' Welfare Organisation. The AWO internal management system operates in accordance with the 9001:2015 ISO standard.

Moreover, the organisation observes the following principles:

- transparency – AWO offers various solutions to the candidate and clearly explains each of them,
- coordination – detailed cooperation with each institution and the person involved in the guidance and validation process from the organisational side,
- easy access – access both to buildings (for example, facilities for the disabled) and shorter waiting times.

Furthermore, the counsellors employed at AWO work in accordance with established standards, based on: solidarity, tolerance, equality, justice and freedom. The most important rules of conduct of the counsellors include:

- confidentiality and the personal data protection of AWO clients,
- respect for each client,
- clients' independence in making decisions, which means, among others, that the counsellors do not influence their choices but only provide support,
- clients' access to education,
- voluntary use of guidance services and participation in validation by clients,
- the professional autonomy of the organisation.

10.2. Quality of the Tools used in Validation

Each of the tools presented (Competence Cards, Career Cards, my-professional-experience.org, the MYSKILLS test) were developed in consultation with experts and practitioners of various occupations.

The sets of cards were examined in a pilot study, after which additional surveys were conducted among the users. An external evaluation of the Competence Cards was conducted (in the form of a survey combined with in-depth interviews). After their introduction in 2017, a survey of their usefulness among 549 counsellors using them was conducted, whereas the Career Cards were extended as a result of consultations (from 10 to 30 jobs) – their external evaluation is scheduled for 2019.

The my-professional-experience.org self-assessment tool was developed in cooperation with AWO counsellors and public employment agencies. The content was also consulted with at least three experts and the first version of the tool was piloted. Cyclical external evaluations are also planned.

The MYSKILLS test was developed in cooperation with over 400 experts responsible for vocational education (from chambers of crafts, chambers of industry and commerce, vocational schools, trade associations). The competence models and sets of questions contained in the test were developed under the supervision of specialists from Humboldt University of Berlin and the Free University of Berlin. The German Institute for International Educational Research conducted the statistical analysis. The MYSKILLS test was the subject of a comprehensive external evaluation at the end of 2018/beginning of 2019.

11. Financing

The validation process is completely free of charge for the candidate and all the costs are covered by public employment agencies, i.e.:

- 25 EUR for the set of Competence Cards, it is also possible to print them from a .pdf file available free of charge from Bertelsmann Stiftung's site,
- 160 EUR for the MYSKILLS test,
- cost of the AWO counsellor's work, which does not exceed 8 hours a day (this work includes conducting an interview using the presented tools and discussion of the results with the candidate) – the cost is estimated based on the time needed for the use of each tool, cost of the work of the employment agency's staffperson who refers the candidate to the
- MYSKILLS test and discusses the results with the client – the cost is estimated based on the time needed for two meetings to take place,
- cost of the work of the Occupational Psychological Service's employee who conducts the MYSKILLS test – the cost is estimated based on the time needed to conduct the test.

12. Context of good practice

The tools presented are constantly being improved and extended. Obtaining feedback from the users poses some difficulty, among others because some content from the interviews with counsellors is confidential. However, the overall perception is that these tools facilitate the identification and documentation of broadly understood competences. Their accessible form allows immigrants to overcome their resistance to using German public institutions.

If a given person wishes to attain a vocational qualification, his/her next step after the MYSKILLS test is to take a vocational exam. However, a great number of persons who could take this exam (it is estimated that presently in Germany approximately 6 million persons aged 25–64 have no occupational qualifications or have not completed higher education studies) do not do so. One of the reasons is their memory of the bad experiences they had while in school. Another reason is that the procedure has two stages – first a person has to prove that he/she has the required professional experience and then – take the relevant exam. To increase the motivation of adults to take the vocational exam, the following are needed:

- introduce the possibility of confirming some of the learning outcomes (so that the candidate does not have to take the entire exam again if he/she did not pass one part of it);
- change the structure of the exam to include the possibility of presenting a portfolio (for example, with samples of work).

These solutions are typically used in the process of the validation of learning outcomes.

Comments

who have no qualifications

who have no qualifications

Immigrants who have qualifications from their own country can apply to have them recognised in Germany in a separate process. This is presented in the Good Practices Database.

transversal skills

transversal

Transversal skills are those that are useful in a variety of jobs, academic disciplines or fields of knowledge, and can be used in a number of situations (including in various types of work). Transversal skills include, among others: the ability to organise one's own work, the ability to learn, social and civic competencies, a sense of initiative and enterprise.