

**Good practice
in validation of learning outcomes**

Switzerland

Qualification "Healthcare assistant"



Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Switzerland. Qualification "Healthcare assistant"

Based on the expertise by dr. Patrizia Salzmann, dr. Delia Salini, Evelyn Tsandev and Saskia Weber Guisan

Editors:

Michał Rostworowski, dr Marcin Trepczyński, Roksana Pierwieniecka, Barbara Przybylska

Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych

ul. Górczewska 8

01-180 Warszawa

tel. (22) 241 71 00; www.ibe.edu.pl

Citation template:

Educational Research Institute (2020). *Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Switzerland. Qualification "Healthcare assistant"*. Warsaw: Educational Research Institute.

© Copyright by: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2020

ISBN 978-83-66612-43-3

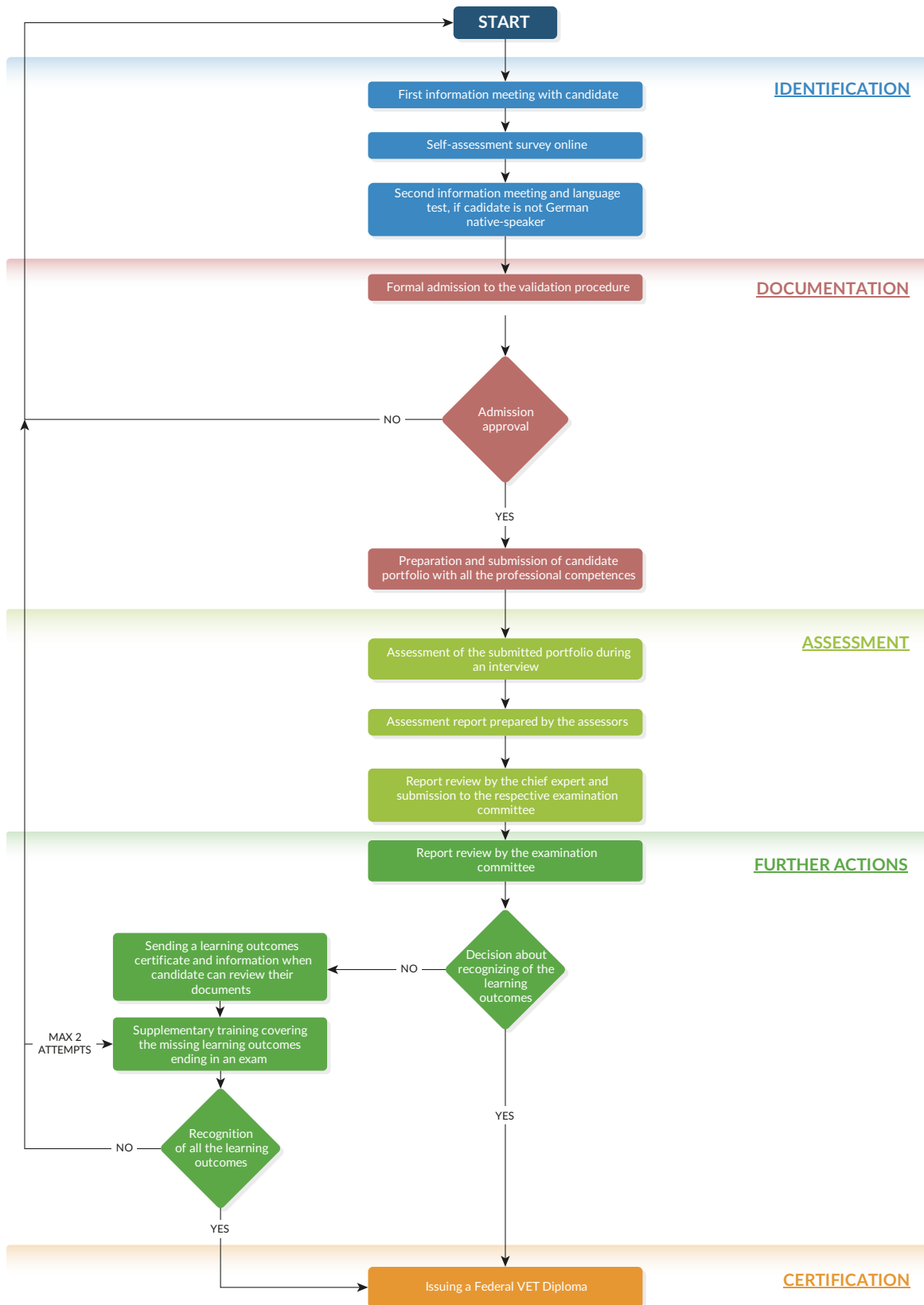
This publication is co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union as part of the project entitled *Support to central government administration, awarding bodies and quality assurance institutions in implementing stage II of the Integrated Qualifications System*.

This copy is free of charge.

Table of contents

1. Country, institution name.	6
2. Institution website.	6
3. Qualifications.	6
4. Short description of the validation process.	6
5. Detailed description of the validation process	6
5.1. Information and Counselling	7
First Information Meeting	7
Survey.	7
Second information meeting.	7
Language tests.	7
5.2. Documentation.	8
Formal Admission to the Validation Procedure	8
Preparation and Submission of the Portfolio.	8
5.3. Assessment	9
5.4. Approval	9
5.5. Certification	10
6. Validation methods.	10
6.1. Self-assessment	10
6.2. Analysis of Evidence.	10
6.3. Written report of experience	10
6.4. Presentation	11
6.5. Workplace observation	11
6.6. Interview with the assessors	11
7. Validation results	11
7.1. Federal Certificate – Diploma.	11
7.2. Learning Outcomes Certificate	12
8. Human resources	12
8.1. Counsellor.	12
8.2. Assessor	12
8.3. Administrator	12
8.4. Other persons.	12
9. Organizational and material conditions.	13
10. Quality assurance	13
11. Financing.	14
11.1. Fees to be paid by the candidate.	14

11.2. Costs borne by the state	14
12. Context of good practice	15
13. Comments.	16



1. Country, institution name

- Switzerland
- Mittelschul-und Berufsbildungsamt (Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training)

2. Institution website

<http://www.mba.zh.ch>

3. Qualifications

Healthcare assistant (European Qualifications Framework level 4)

Medizinische Praxisassistent/in (EQF L4)

4. Short description of the validation process

The validation process in Switzerland consists of the following stages:

- **information and advising:** a counsellor informs candidates about the possibility of taking part in validation as well as about the entire process and enables them to ask personal questions this stage; this is organised by the Office of Youth and Careers Guidance – an institution providing information and counselling services
- **documentation:** the candidates prepare a portfolio to provide evidence of already acquired professional [1] competences and an understanding of language, communication and society (LCS [2] hereinafter, language competences)
- **assessment:** two or three assessors assess the equivalence of the evidenced competences in the portfolio and the competence profile specified in the regulation on vocational education and training; the assessment of the portfolio is supplemented with an interview between the candidate and the assessors; the assessors jointly write an assessment report, which is submitted to an examination committee [3]
- **approval:** the examination committee reviews the assessment report and issues a certificate of confirmed competences if part of the competences are confirmed, it also specifies supplementary training or on-the-job training that the candidate must complete to attain the qualification
- **certification:** when all the required competences have been confirmed, the cantonal office issues a federal diploma, equivalent to a diploma awarded in formal education

Healthcare assistants usually work in in-patient and out-patient healthcare and social welfare institutions. They perform various medical tasks and care for the physical and mental health of patients. They also provide administrative and logistic services. Persons who have this qualification can find jobs in hospitals, clinics, treatment and rehabilitation centres, centres for disabled persons, nursing homes and in the homes of individual clients.

[1] According to the terminology used by the canton of Zurich, competences are broadly understood (they specify the skills of solving problems and adapting to the current situation) as a combination of knowledge, skills and social competences/attitudes. The term 'competences' is used instead of the term 'learning outcomes'

[2] These are subjects taught as part of vocational education and training so that persons can acquire skills in these three areas.

[3] The examination committee is thus the body that operates as part of the formal education system.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

Validation in Switzerland is understood as a process of confirming acquired professional experience. It is one of four possible ways of attaining vocational qualifications, which includes:

1. professional training (in the traditional formal way)
2. direct admission of experienced adults to the final exam without the need to attend a vocational education and training (VET) programme
3. shortened VET programme if the adult is able to demonstrate knowledge in the desired occupational field
4. validation of non-formal and informal learning, without a formal final exam

This description of a good practice relates to the last path (point 4). Presently, 14 occupational qualifications, together with the “Healthcare assistant” qualification, can be attained through validation. It should be also stressed that not all these qualifications are available in each region. The validation process may be available for a given qualification in one region, while not in another. Thus it sometimes requires the candidates to travel.

The following subsections include a detailed description of the individual validation stages in the canton of Zurich.

The condition for entering the entire process is documentation of five years’ professional experience, of which at least three years must relate to the given professional area.

5.1. Information and Counselling

There are two required informational meetings conducted by the counsellors of the Office of Youth and Careers Guidance, a survey and a voluntary language skills test for persons whose native tongue is a foreign language.

First Information Meeting

During the first meeting, candidates are informed about how to obtain a diploma (as mentioned above, there are four possible ways) and about the validation process. The meetings take place in groups, usually once a month. Moreover, the candidates can use individual coaching services.

Survey

The candidates then log in to a portal and perform a required self-check (self-assessment) to determine whether they meet the requirements in terms of:

1. professional experience (example of an entry: “I have sufficiently extensive professional experience”.
Information: at least five years’ professional experience is required to enter the validation process, including at least three years connected with the given professional area)
2. documentation of professional competences (example of an entry: “I am able to specify the professional situation in detail to clearly demonstrate what my tasks were and how i acted”)
3. resources (example of an entry: “I have time to work regularly on my validation portfolio”)

The candidates are asked to take a stand on each of the above statements using a four-point Likert scale:

does not apply – partially applies – largely applicable – applies.

The survey also helps the candidates to determine whether they are ready to enter validation.

Second information meeting

Interested candidates learn how to create a portfolio during the second information meeting. Moreover, the elements of the validation procedure are discussed in detail (documentation, various ways of assessing skills, formalities to be completed online) and available types of support.

Language tests

A language skills test (free online placement test) is recommended in particular if German is not the native language of the candidate. The B1 language level is required for the validation procedure.

After the second information meeting, candidates decide whether to take part in the validation process.

5.2. Documentation

This stage consists of three steps:

1. formal admission to the validation procedure
2. preparation of the validation portfolio
3. submission of the validation portfolio

Formal Admission to the Validation Procedure

At the beginning of the second stage, candidates submit an online application for entering the validation procedure, which is assessed by the Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training.

The candidates confirm that they have five years' professional experience (including three years' experience in a job connected with the given qualification) with certificates of employment or other documents.

At the beginning of this stage, any training completed by the candidates is checked to determine whether certain competences can be confirmed. Determinations are made about the prior training that can be recognised and announced by the cantonal professional organisation (i.e. Odasanté) in cooperation with the Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training.

After submission of the documents, candidates are notified within three weeks of whether they have been admitted to validation, as well as of any recognised competences acquired through prior training. At this point, the candidates can prepare their portfolios. However, before their portfolio is submitted, they must have fulfilled all the admission requirements.

Preparation and Submission of the Portfolio

All professional competences that must be documented in a portfolio are defined in:

- the Swiss regulation of 19 November 2003 on vocational training (Verordnung über die Berufsbildung, Bundesrecht)
- the education programme for healthcare assistants
- the competence profile [4] for the healthcare assistant's job specified by the professional organisation Odasanté (which is composed of representatives of employers, employees, experts and stakeholders of the occupation)

To attain the healthcare assistant qualification, twenty two modules are required, two of which must be attained through formal education or continuing education. In addition to vocational competences, language competences should also be documented (2 LSC modules).

The candidates start preparing the portfolios after completing the self-check list, used to assess their knowledge and experiences relating to each module. This self-check may be supplemented with a third-party assessment, for example, of an employer. Then the candidate must document the competences that he/she has declared having.

In the canton of Zurich there are **four possible ways to document professional competences**:

1. a written report of experiences
2. an oral report of experiences (presentation)
3. workplace observation
4. project and order documentation (however, this method is not used for the qualification described herein)

Certain competences (for example, the first aid module or the basic course in kinaesthetics for healthcare assistants) must be acquired formally through an authorised institution.

Certificates on employment and completed training that refer to specific professional competences can also be submitted as evidence of having competences.

Language competences can only be documented by at least three written reports of experience.

The required competences that the candidate has not declared should be acquired through supplementary training or on-the-job training.

5.3. Assessment

The submitted portfolio is assessed by two experts acting as assessors. If the candidate has declared that he/she has language competences, an additional expert for languages, communication and society participates in assessing the portfolio.

Then the candidate is invited to an interview to:

- clarify ambiguities (for example, in the wording contained in the written report of experience)
- dispel doubts (for example, concerning a company's operating practices)
- verify whether the candidate wrote the report of experiences by him/herself

The interview lasts 45 minutes. If the assessment also includes language competences, 60 minutes are allowed for the interview.

Then the assessors determine the overall assessment together. If they do not agree, the chief expert from the occupational field is called in.

After making a joint decision, the assessors prepare an assessment report.

The report is reviewed by the chief expert and submitted to the respective examination committee (see section 4).

The candidate can view the detailed assessment during stage 4.

5.4. Approval

During this stage, the examination committee reviews whether the assessment report is correct and plausible.

If the committee approves it, a learning outcomes certificate is sent to the candidate. By obtaining the certificate, candidates are informed about the proposed date on which they can review all of the documentation. If they wish to do so, they have one and a half hours to review the general assessment of the assessors, meet with the chief expert to explain any doubts concerning the assessment, discuss the possibility of completing additional training or lodge any appeals.

The certificate indicates which modules have or have not been completed. The document is valid for five years, so the candidate has exactly five years to complete any supplementary training to complete the unconfirmed modules.

Along with the certificate, candidates also obtain a list of authorised institutions offering additional training. The supplementary training is adapted to the modules examined during documentation and assessment, which helps the candidate determine the courses that should be taken. Each additional training course ends with a test (oral, written or practical), which can be taken twice. After completing the additional training, candidates obtain a document informing them about the next steps leading to the confirmation of all learning outcomes required for the qualification.

5.5. Certification

When all the required professional and language competences have been confirmed, the canton issues a Federal VET Diploma. This diploma is identical to the diploma obtained through formal vocational education and training.

[4] *Competence profiles* are specified for various jobs by trade unions in order to unify the educational quality of a given job.

6. Validation methods

The following validation methods are used in the canton of Zurich:

- self-assessment
- analysis of evidence
- written report of experience
- presentation
- workplace observation
- interview with assessors

There are many possibilities of adapting the way validation is performed to the abilities of candidates, including people who have difficulty reading and writing. Preparing a long written report of experience may be a serious problem for many candidates, so methods of demonstrating competences that do not require the skills of advanced reading and writing are provided.

6.1. Self-assessment

The candidate conducts a self-assessment, known as a self-check, at the stage of documentation. By filling out the self-check sheet, the candidate assesses his/her knowledge and experiences individually in accordance with a four-point scale.

This method helps the candidates to specify the competences that they may have acquired as part of informal or non-formal education (this is why they are often unaware that they have them) and that may be important for a given qualification.

Self-checks can be supplemented with statements from a third party (for example, an employer).

The self-check sheet is included in the portfolio and used as a starting point to specify the documents that should be collected.

6.2. Analysis of Evidence

Assessors analyse evidence on the basis of the portfolio. a portfolio is a file created in the canton of Zurich on a dedicated Internet portal that documents all professional and language competences.

6.3. Written report of experience

A written report of experience is a document prepared by the candidate in which he/she indicates what has been learned through non-formal and informal education in relation to a given module. Each report is based on one or several tasks, such as:

- a specific task with content specifications (for example *Describe a specific care situation and respond to specific questions relating to that situation*)
- open task: the candidates use a specific example to demonstrate that they have the required professional competences; they describe what and why they did and reflect on their actions

The length of these reports is not precisely specified, although a length of 3 – 4 pages per task is recommended.

A report template as well as a model report are available on the portal where the candidates create their portfolios.

The assessment criteria of the reports are clearly presented to the candidates; their competences are examined on the basis of their selected activities, descriptions of what they did and why and their reflections about this.

6.4. Presentation

The candidates can demonstrate having the competences of a given module in the form of a presentation, by performing the same tasks as in the case of a written report of experience only orally. The presentation consists of the same three elements as for the written report: 1) description, 2) justification and 3) reflection.

Candidates have 30 minutes for this task (20 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes for answering questions). They can use presentation tools, such as a program for displaying presentations, flipcharts and tables.

Two assessors are present during the presentation. a report of the presentation and the conversation are kept by one of the experts. The same assessment criteria apply as for the written report.

6.5. Workplace observation

During workplace observation, candidates can demonstrate specific professional competences. The consent of the employer should first be obtained to perform a workplace observation. Then the date is set through the validation portal. Before the beginning of the visit, a work plan for the expert conducting the observation should be prepared (a template for the plan is available on the portal).

After the workplace observation, the expert asks the candidate questions based on the assessment criteria and, if needed, asks him/her to provide detailed information about selected issues.

Several such visits can be planned. During each visit, no more than four modules may be assessed and the assessment of a single module cannot occur over several observation visits. Thus, the competences of a given module are observed and assessed only once. Each module requires a 30-minute observation (in addition, no more than 5 minutes for questions are allowed). Reports of the visit are used to document the competences of the candidate and are archived.

6.6. Interview with the assessors

An interview with the assessors is conducted at the assessment stage after the candidate's portfolio is assessed. The candidate is invited to an interview to:

- clarify ambiguities (for example, in the wording used in the written report of experiences)
- dispel doubts (for example, concerning a company's operating practices)
- verify whether the candidate wrote the report of experiences by him/herself

The interview lasts 45 minutes. If the assessment also includes language competences, 60 minutes are allowed for the interview.

7. Validation results

7.1. Federal Certificate – Diploma

The end result of the validation process in Switzerland is receipt of the Federal VET Diploma, i.e. a state

diploma. This means that the end result of validation does not differ at all from a diploma awarded in the formal education system (at school or during studies). The federal diploma confirms the full qualification, so partial certification is in principle impossible; this means that the certificate is issued no earlier than at the fifth stage, when **all** the required professional and language competences have been confirmed.

7.2. Learning Outcomes Certificate

However, as part of the validation procedure, modules that are part of the qualification may be confirmed and a learning outcomes certificate can be obtained on this basis. The candidate then has five years to confirm the missing modules and obtain the federal diploma referred to above.

8. Human resources

In Switzerland (including in the canton of Zurich), the following persons are involved in the validation process:

- 1) counsellors
- 2) assessors (also called examiners)
- 3) validation procedure administrators

8.1. Counsellor

The tasks of the counsellor include supporting the candidates during the first two validation stages:

- at the information and counselling stage they provide information and advice
- at the documentation stage, they conduct the obligatory information meetings

The counsellor should:

- have qualifications corresponding to his/her function
- have experience in education, counselling or adult training
- have a strong understanding of the concept of vocational education and training
- have sound knowledge about the validation process and its rules

8.2. Assessor

The task of the assessor is to:

- assess the learning outcomes of candidates at the assessment stage
- assess the reports of experience
- perform workplace observations of candidates at the documentation stage

The assessor should:

- have sound knowledge about the vocational education and training system and the qualification procedure
- complete a special course for examiners in the field of validation and recognition of prior learning

8.3. Administrator

The administrator coordinates the entire validation process.

The administrator is expected to have managerial experience in the specific occupational field.

8.4. Other persons

Also involved in the validation process are clerks, who perform the administrative work at all stages of the validation procedure, as well as properly trained instructors, who provide supplemental training.

9. Organizational and material conditions

Experience has shown that the entire validation procedure lasts from 1½–3 years. The time from submitting the portfolio (at the end of the documentation stage) to having a certificate issued is about 6 months. Certification alone takes 4–8 weeks. Although the waiting time may seem long, the candidates involved do not become discouraged and this prevents the validation process from being completed too quickly.

The canton of Zurich uses an Internet portal to manage the validation path of each candidate. This portal is used for:

- independent orientation by potential candidates through the survey and information provided
- creation of portfolios
- communication of results
- monitoring additional training and the progress of the candidate in confirming modules

10. Quality assurance

The quality assurance of validation in Switzerland is a task performed by various institutions.

The **Confederation**, understood as the management at the federal level, is responsible for ensuring the quality of the entire validation process: it prepares quality standards and develops monitoring tools. It also is required to guarantee regional and sectoral diversity and this is why it accepts specific cantonal procedures, including the competence profiles for various occupations. As part of the **Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBKK)** (responsible for coordinating the activities and exchange of experiences among the cantons), the **National Commission for Vocational Qualifications for Adults (CSFP/SBBK)** is responsible for validation and ensuring the quality of validation.

Cantons are responsible for implementing qualification procedures. In particular, they have to:

- create structures in accordance with federal validation guidelines and appoint contractors for the services
- ensure the quality of qualification procedures
- award qualifications
- organise additional training
- elaborate procedures and further develop them
- establish assessment bodies, which are examination committees in the canton of Zurich (each committee is composed of the representatives of: a) a professional organisation representing the given sector of the economy and the given qualification, b) the canton and c) vocational schools).

Professional organisations (representatives of employers, employees, experts and stakeholders of a given occupation) are responsible for the content of vocational education and training programmes. These organisations operate at two levels: national and regional. At the regional level, they are responsible for appointing assessors (who are also involved in the formal education system). At the national level, they are responsible for specifying the competence profile and assessment criteria for these competences.

Awarding bodies, in accordance with Article 8 of the act on professional education, are responsible for ensuring the constant improvement of the quality of the services provided to the candidate. On the basis of this Article, the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) [5] issued detailed regulations in 2010 on the quality assurance of validation procedures.

Such regulations, called control lists, are provided for various stages of validation as inspection instruments for the “inspection and development of the procedure’s quality”. The following enumerates the control lists:

- control list for processing and developing competence profiles and assessment criteria
- control list for the cantonal authorities that supervise vocational education and training
- control list for access (counselling) services
- control list for the services responsible for assessing competences
- control list for cantonal experts (assessors)
- control list for the services responsible for validation

[5] Since 2013, administrative changes merged the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (in French: Office Federal de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Technologie – OFFT) with the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) and established the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is a specialised entity of the Swiss federal government responsible for national and international issues relating to education, research and innovation.

11. Financing

11.1. Fees to be paid by the candidate

When candidates decide to enter the validation procedure (after the second information meeting), an initial registration fee of 90 CHF (about 340 PLN) is paid. The remaining fees depend, among others, on the canton where the candidate lives, the supplementary training which must be taken, and whether he/she has any diploma. At the national level, it has been estimated that the average cost of the validation process for a candidate is between 4000 and 7000 CHF. This is significantly lower than the cost of full vocational training.

11.2. Costs borne by the state

The financing of validation training is linked to the general financing framework of the education system. According to the act on vocational education and training “other training paths” – namely validation – are included in the federal flat-rate subsidy that the cantons obtain. This means that **validation procedures are financed from the same budget as formal education and training programmes.**

Moreover, the Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBKK) [6] provides **guidelines concerning inter-canton financing systems.** In particular, persons can use the validation procedures of a different canton than the one where they live when their home canton does not offer an approval procedure for a selected occupation or when a limited number of persons are participating in the procedure.

This does not mean that the candidate bears no costs at all. It means that the cantons bear part of the costs of the validation process.

In 2010, consultations with various cantonal services made it possible to estimate the average costs per person for each stage of the procedure. **On the basis of average cantonal costs, the governments determined the maximum flat rate to be paid for each stage of the procedure when they sponsor the validation.** At present, these rates in the canton of Zurich probably stopped covering the actual validation costs due to the development of counselling services and the introduction of alternative methods of demonstrating skills. Thus the flat rates should be revised.

The recommendations of the Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBKK) state that basic professional and educational guidance should be completely free of charge and that candidates should only be charged fees for special or extended services. Furthermore, the Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBKK) suggests that when a candidate has no qualifications, the cantons should pay the costs of the entire validation process (including the cost of potential additional training). If validation is used to attain additional qualifications, the candidate may be charged with part of the costs.

All stages of validation in the canton of Zurich are free of charge for persons that have no qualifications at the

level of year 2 of secondary school (upper secondary school) and additional training is subsidized up to 50% of the costs borne by the candidate.

[6] In French CSFP – Conférence suisse des offices de formation professionnelle, in German SBBK – Die Schweizerische Berufsbildungsämter-Konferenz.

12. Context of good practice

The Office of Youth and Careers Guidance plays an extremely important role in the canton of Zurich. It is a public institution, comparable to a certain degree to the Polish voivodship labour offices, which helps young people select a field of study (vocational and general) and is responsible for providing information and counselling during the first two stages of the validation process.

Another key institution at the level of the canton is the Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training. In the context of validation, it plays the role of an awarding body, is responsible for appointing the examination committee, and issues certificates. It also prepares the basic tools for monitoring (in particular, to collect feedback and the questions of experts, information and the questions of participants), coordinates validation services and the counselling on additional training.

When considered in historical terms, validation practices evolved in line with initiatives supported by civil society, local organisations, non-governmental organisations, professionals and state institutions, so they were created using both a bottom-up and top-down approach. They influenced each other and thanks to their constant interactions, local and national projects emerged at different levels of the education system and in the professional context.

The development of Swiss validation practices can be characterised by four stages:

1. forerunner projects from before the 1990s (mainly in the field of the recognition of prior learning and not validation)
2. pilot projects developed at the local level in the 1990s
3. dissemination of projects in the VET sector on the basis of the VET Act of 2002, which became more institutionalised and scaled up to the national level; since that time persons with at least five years' professional experience have been able to apply for validation and be awarded federal vocational qualifications
4. restructuring of the bodies shaping educational policy (since 2013) that led to the establishment of the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI); validation was then integrated with other, formal paths of attaining qualifications; the objective of this reform was to increase the permeability between education sectors and to remedy the lack of qualified employees in specific branches of the economy

This gradual centralisation and institutionalisation of validation practices has modified the approach taken in the development of validation – bottom-up and decentralised to centralised and top-down. For this reason, the majority of non-governmental partners who promoted validation practices in the past have presently limited themselves to marginal activities because they cannot intervene in an official role in validation practices because they are not members of official bodies responsible for the procedures, although they may be consulted.

Presently, the Confederation, in cooperation with the cantons and professional organisations, determines the framework of the validation process and also partially finances and promotes vocational education and training. The Confederation is also responsible for quality control and further developing the entire system, whereas the cantons implement and monitor VET programmes and issue certificates in the name of the federal government. Professional organisations, including trade associations, are responsible for the development and content of the training. They specify, among others, validation methods and tools, competence profiles and the profile of the requirements for examiners, as well as the principles of assessment.

13. Comments

Certain obstacles stand in the way of further developing validation in Switzerland, including in the canton of Zurich:

- There is still insufficient social awareness of the validation procedure, in particular in workplaces and in various public offices providing services to potential candidates.
- Participants are usually informed about the procedures only during the validation process. When entering individual stages, they usually do not know what they can expect.
- Differences exist in individual regions and sectors relating to the possibility of attaining qualifications through validation; the offer should be extended.
- There is some doubt about the quality of the qualifications attained through validation: do persons who have received a diploma in this way have the same competences as persons who have completed the entire vocational training programme? Does the qualification have the same value in both situations? It should be remembered that the validation process is accessible mainly to persons with at least five years' professional experience.
- The official centralized statistics on validation procedures, the number of users and success ratios, are not fully available, although actions have been taken to change this in the canton of Zurich.