

National Report on quality in guidance in group settings in AUSTRIA

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1 Offers in scope of guidance in group setting measures in Austria

The number of courses in the area of vocational training is continuously increasing in Austria. The courses and their contents differ depending on the offering institutions which are located all over Austria. At federal level the Ministry for Education, Art and Culture (bm:ukk) is mainly responsible for adult education. At regional level there is a network of responsible governmental institutions. Some of the most important adult education organisations are organized in the umbrella organisation "Conference of Austrian Adult Education" (KEBÖ - Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich). Especially important for vocational orientation measures are for example the Institute for Economic Development (WIFI - Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut), the Vocational Training Institute (BFI - Berufsförderungsinstitut Österreich), the Institute for Further Education in Rural Areas (LFI - Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut), the Forum for Catholic Adult Education (FORUM - Forum katholischer Erwachsenenbildung) and the association of the Adult Education Centres (VÖV - Verband der österreichischen Volkshochschulen). These Adult Education Centres were funded by the people's education movement at the turn of the 20th century. They especially exist in Vienna and other cities in Austria, but not on the country side.

The main institutions in Austria, which offer and finance adult learning in general and vocational orientation in particular, are the Ministry for Education, Art and Culture (bm:ukk). www.bmukk.at¹, the Ministry for employment, social tasks and consumerism (bm:ask, www.bmask.gv.at), and the Public Employment Service (PES, in German AMS - Arbeitsmarktservice). Additionally a number of private organisations, special interest groups (for example organisations representing specific groups such as migrants) but also political parties, trade unions and the chamber of labour (AK - Arbeiterkammer) as well as municipal institutions offer trainings in vocational orientation. These

¹ The Public Employment Service for example is under the financial and political control of this Ministry.

organisations offer both vocational orientation in group settings and individual coaching.

Another important initiative has been established by the Public Employment Service at regional level: Several regional Vocational Information Centers (BIZ-Berufsinformationszentrum) have been established all over Austria. These centers provide information and advice with a more regional focus. They allow potential adult learners to receive broader and more objective advice and information than it is possibly provided by individual institutions. The impartiality of the guidance staff of the respective institutions can be questioned, as they are as well requested to market and sell the courses of their institutions.

1.1 Initiator(s) of guidance measures

Career information, guidance and counselling are major educational tasks in the field of adult education. The creation of comprehensive "education databases" in all Austrian provinces (www.erwachsenenbildung.at; www.eduvista.com; www.PES.at/buw.html), the formation of a national platform for educational counselling, and the arrangement of inter-institutional education information and counselling services acting independently from the service providers prove that vocational guidance becomes increasingly important. There are different organisations initiating vocational orientation and activation. However, the most important one is the Public Employment Service.

The Austrian Public Employment Service delivers its services in some 113 local offices.

The most basic and low-threshold service the PESs offer is the self-service area, which is available to everybody: the employed, job seekers, and people who are (currently) not actively involved in the labour market (e.g. due to parental leave). At this level basic information and job vacancy information are provided. Job vacancies are available online, through the internet, which can be accessed in the self-service areas. The more personal service area on the contrary offers advice, information, job placement and unemployment benefit administration and is only available to job seekers. The third service provided

by the PES is the counselling area. It involves more intensive counselling and advice for those with particularly difficult labour market situations. Clients of special target groups – for example women returning to work after maternity leave, disabled persons and older job seekers – are automatically referred to this counselling area. Others are sent to the counselling area after remaining jobless for more than three month. At any one time roughly 25-30% of job seekers get information and support in the counselling area. Since 2006 each regional office has a so called “ServiceLine”. In these callcenters questions, which can be easily answered, can be asked so to release the situation of the counselling areas. This structure of delivering labour market services in smooth transitions replaces the previous system, in which job placement including counselling was strictly separated from the administration of social benefits.

In addition to services for job seekers, the PES also provides services for companies, thus e.g. counselling and a general cooperation with companies in recruiting staff. Furthermore the PES supports the employment of elderly workers, those affected by job cuts and low-qualified persons by improving their skills. However, this field only represents a very small part of the work of the PES.

In addition to the directly provided services, the PES assigns a range of profit and non-profit organisations to provide guidance services. These organisations again subcontract these services to self-employed counsellors. Many of this courses take place in the form of six week “orientation” courses in groups of 14-20 people, which cover fields like job finding techniques and career planning, but also the development of personal and social skills.

The PES assures itself of the quality by using a federal quality standard which defines the trainers’ skills and qualifications. Trainers working for public or private institutions providing courses financed by the PES have to conform themselves to this standard. The quality standard can be modified by each of the regional PES departments. They can adapt it to the needs of the specific measures offered in the region. This concept allows flexibility but does not guarantee consistent quality assurance (for further information about the

requested training of guidance staff in Austria see chapter 1.4). In attempt to develop an improved approach to quality assurance, a Professional Association of Counsellors was formed in 2001 (VBB- Verband für Berufs- und Bildungsberatung, www.berufsberater.at). Membership is voluntary and requires initial training or experience in the field, commitment to ethical standards, willingness to undertake further training and to accept professional supervision.

As the importance of the field of vocational education (and adult education in general) has increased during the last years many other similar associations have been established. They all have different focuses, but there is no general interest group for all adult and further education trainers in Austria.

A yearly Job Training and Information Fair (BeST- Messe für Beruf, Studium und Weiterbildung) takes place in different bigger cities in Austria initiated by the Federal Ministry for Education, Art and Culture, the Federal Ministry for Science and Research (bm:wf, www.bmwf.gv.at), and the PES Austria. Another fair that takes place yearly in different bigger cities is the „Interpädagogica“. This fair is the only one in the field of education for all educators, trainers, multipliers, and everyone else interested in education. The above mentioned ministries are important initiators financing adult learning in general and vocational orientation in particular.

The Chamber of Commerce (www.berufsinfo.at) initiates and offers different vocational and educational information and counselling services, especially for adolescents (age 15-18). The Chamber of Labour (<http://wien.arbeiterkammer.at/bildung.htm>) offers information for further education and offers personal counselling with trainers for people of all age.

Another initiators of adult education are the industrial unions, but they mainly offer further education for their respective members in the specific field of profession. Other promoters of adult education are churches, political parties, federal states and municipalities.

The adult education organisations mentioned above such as the Institute for Economic Development (Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut), the Vocational Training Institute (Berufshilfsinstitut), the Adult Education Centres (Volkshochschulen), church institutions for adult education or the Institute for Further Education in Rural Areas (Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut) provide their own counselling services, but most of them are financed by the Public Employment Service.

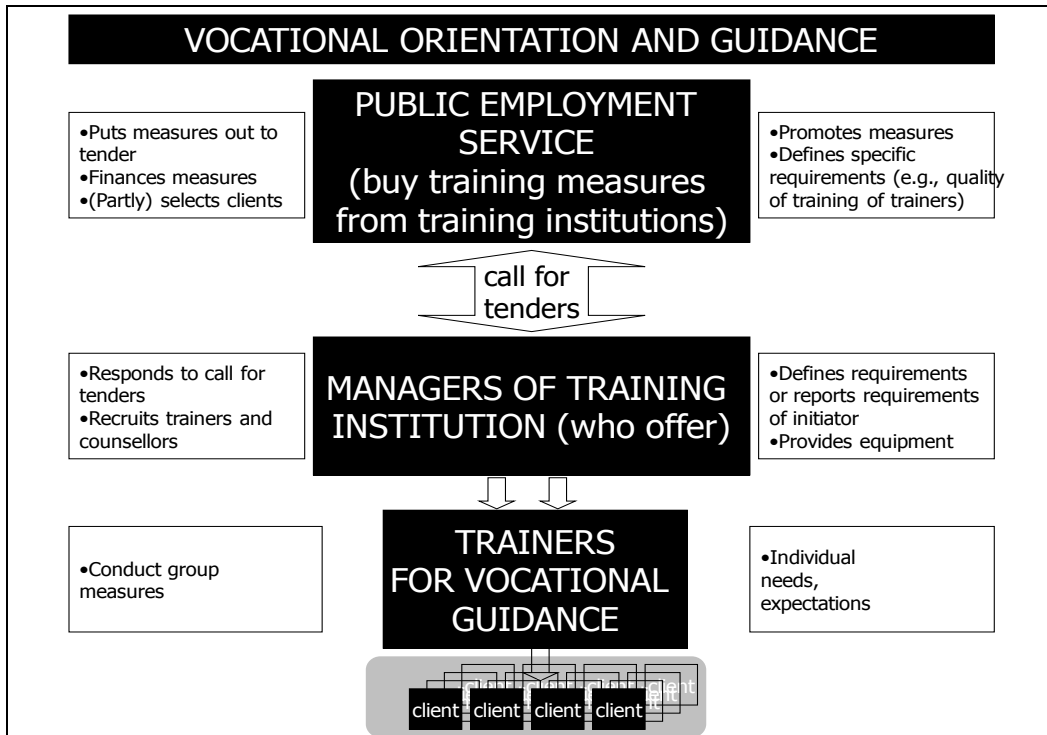
1.2 Organisations carrying out the training measures

The training measures themselves are not carried out by the Public Employment Service, the Federal Ministry and all other initiators that finance vocational orientation itself. These organisations call the public training institutions (organisations of the social partnership: Wifi, BFI, BBRZ etc.) or private training organisations (Venetia, Mentor, ABZ Wien) for tenders. The organisations of the Austrian Social Partnership², representing both employers and employees, both have service centres for career information and counselling.

The Economic Chamber (Wirtschaftskammer) emphasises counselling on commercial-vocational training as well as job-related further education. Courses and trainings are conducted by their Institutes for Economic Development (WIFI). The Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer) is the legal representative of the employees in Austria. The chamber works in close co-operation with the trade unions. They represent the social, vocational, economical and cultural interests of the employees. The Chamber of Labour among others offers free career guidance and counselling.

The following diagram shows the tasks to be performed by the different actors: the Public Employment Service, organisation providing the trainings and the individual trainers:

² The Austrian Social Partnership is a system of co-operation between the major economic interest groups and between them and the government. The economic interest groups are four large representative organisations – the Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), the Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ), the Federal Chamber of Labour (BAK) and the Chamber of Agriculture (LK).



1.3 Setting in which vocational orientation and activation measures are carried out in Austria (either as single coaching, group coaching, group training etc.)

The Public Employment Service determines the number of participants in a training course, the number of groups to be formed within the course and the number of participants in each group.

Vocational orientation and activation measures are carried out in groups of approximately 10-15 people. It is up to the Public Employment Service to decide into how many parts the course is divided.

To take a concrete example, the PES calls for tender for the course “IT´s your chance”, which focuses on vocational orientation³. The training course is divided into two parts. The first part is the clearing phase. It is compulsory for all participants in the course. The objectives of this part are providing broad information on the topic (e.g. job descriptions, requirement profiles, training

³ „IT´s your chance“ is a vocational orientation course focusing on IT skills and competences.

opportunities), the selection of the participants using an assessment centre and the clearing focusing on IT-knowledge, motivation and interest in further qualification as well as the (career) expectations of the participants. The other main part of the course is the vocational orientation itself, which is organised in different modules, for example "competence-check", "job-profiling", workshops, practical training, visit of a career centre etc.

This allocation of tasks (between PES and trainer) creates on the hand advantages, as the trainers get a very clear picture of what the PES expects in terms of products and goals, but on the other hand it can also cause disadvantages as the trainers cannot adapt contents to the needs of the participants. They cannot use their creativity to adjust and/or modify the course structure.

The training course is, as defined by the PES, composed of both plenum sessions, in which trainer works with the group as a whole, and single coaching in which the trainer works with one participant in a face-to-face context.

More and more people make use of the increasing number of "virtual counseling" via internet. This is of course less individual and the face to face contact is missing. However, the users have the possibility to virtually check their interests and excellences, often by written tests, and to get an idea of their individual job profile as well its labor market prospects.

1.4 Requested initial and further training of guidance staff in Austria

In Austria there are still no accredited job description or quality standards for trainers. The offer of TTT ("Train The Trainer") educations are very heterogeneous concerning content, duration, and costs. The different institutions that offer vocational orientation and counselling have different internal standards regarding the education their employees have to have.

The initial training of **employees** of the Public Employment Service, which is a very important initiator of educational orientation measures in Austria, is internally regulated. Those who work in the area of counselling must at least

have a leaving school examination equivalent to the Austrian "Matura" (Reifeprüfung)⁴. All staff have to pass a basic internal training for ten months, which is composed of theoretical courses and practical modules. The details of the training content differ depending on the concrete field of responsibility of each staff member. A final examination completes the training. Additional further training is offered each year. The focus depends on the strategic objectives of the respective PES.

Concerning measures which are put out to tender by the respective PES, the qualifications of the external **trainers** working for the training organization has a strong influence on the success of submitting a tender. After receiving tenders from the training organisations, the Public Employment Service evaluates each trainer's CV according to a criteria set by the Federal Awarding Office (*Bundesvergabeamt*). These criteria are not defined in detail. Therefore, each province uses its own specific criteria.

Only one basic criterion is defined, which is that every coach/trainer needs 110 hours of training. Points are given to each trainer, depending on how many criteria she/he reaches. Due to the regional differences of the criteria, a trainer in Vienna can only get a high score if he/she has an academic degree, whereas in other regions he/she could be evaluated with highest score also when having a non-university educational level.

In the following, the criteria of the Public Employment Service Vienna are described in detail. The PES Vienna evaluates tenders for training measures in the field of activation and vocational orientation along three assessment criteria: formal qualifications (60% of the total tender evaluation) and experience (40%). There are only two preconditions: First at least 110 hours of formal trainer/coaching education and second a minimum age of 25 years.

⁴ According to the ISCED classification, "Reifeprüfung" corresponds to level 3 secondary education second stage (which corresponds to the end of high school)

As far as the formal qualification is concerned, the trainers have to have completed at least 110 hours of a trainer/coaching education. This education has to include at least the following content:

- group processes / group dynamics (basics in group dynamics and group psychology, working with groups, group coaching, etc.)
- basics in communication (communication models, negotiation, feedback, mimic, gesture, etc.)
- basics in moderation/ moderation techniques
- methodology - didactics/ use of methods (use of the methods according to the situation and the target group, developing methods, training heterogeneous groups, etc.)
- presentation techniques/ use of media
- conflict management (definition, models, conflict dynamics and diagnosis, intervention, etc.)
- planning of education and training (definition of target groups, creating concepts and scripts, time management, basics of efficient planning of training, etc.)

Beyond that, they can achieve additional points if they hold other degrees and/or completed further education, e.g. as mediator, life and social counsellor or university degrees (for example in the field of psychology, education, communication, sociology, social work).

Concerning the work experience of the trainers, there is no obligatory criteria, but the trainers can get additional points when they can refer to previous work experience.

Once a trainer has worked at least for five years in PES measures and/ or in measures financed by other institutions but with similar objectives (e.g. labour

market integration measures financed by non-profit organizations), he/she can be certified as a "PES Senior Expert".

The educational and vocational counsellors of the social partnership, to be found mainly in the Institute for Economic Development (Economic Chambers) and the Vocational Training Institute (Chamber of Labour) are also internally trained. Many of them are skilled psychologists, social education teachers or have similar qualifications. The staff meets on a regular basis to exchange experiences but also to participate at further trainings in specific areas.

The Federal Institute for Adult Education in St. Wolfgang (BIFEB- Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung St. Wolfgang) offers trainings targeting educational and vocational counsellors. The trainings deal with topics like client-centered counseling, information management, tools of educational counseling, systematic counselling, teaching counselling etc. („Training course for educational and vocational counselling"; German: „Lehrgang universitären Charakters für Bildungs- und Berufsberatung", www.bifeb.at).

Additionally there are several other training offers for trainers who want to work in the field of vocational orientation:

- ECGC study programme at the Donau-Universität Krems: The ECGC partner Danube University Krems is about to start a study programme, which shall cover ECGC content and beyond (www.donau-uni.ac.at).
- Vocational training as career and education counsellor (Ausbildung zum bzw. zur Berufs- und BildungsberaterIn) at the Institute for Economic Development (Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut, WIFI) in Vienna (www.wifiwien.at).
- Vocational training as vocational orientation trainer and education counsellor (Ausbildung zum bzw. zur BerufsorientierungstrainerIn und BildungsberaterIn) at the Institute of Economic Development (WIFI- Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut) in Burgenland (www.bglld.wifi.at).

- University course "Career Management – career planning advice MAS" (Universitätslehrgang Career Management – Laufbahnberatung MAS) at the University of Klagenfurt (www.uni-klu.ac.at/cml).
- Professional Teaching and Training (MA) at the Danube University Krems (www.donau-uni.ac.at).
- Vocational orientation trainer course (Diplomlehrgang zum/zur BerufsorientierungstrainerIn) at the Vocational Training Institute (Berufsförderungsintstitut, bfi) in Vienna (www.bfiwien.or.at)
- Vocational training as a perfect trainer (Ausbildung zum/zur Perfect TrainerIn) at the Vocational Training Institute (Berufsförderungsinstitut, bfi) in Styria (www.bfi-stmk.at)
- Vocational training as a vocational orientation trainer (Lehrgang: Ausbildung zum/zur BerufsorientierungstrainerIn) at the Adult Education Centre (Volkshochschule, VHS) in Vienna West (www.vhs.at/vhs_wienw.html)
- Further education as a competence orientated counsellor (Weiterbildung zum/zur kompetenzorientierten BeraterIn (KOB)) at the future centre (Zukunftszentrum) in Tyrol (www.zukunftszentrum.at/service/kompetenzbilanz/expertinnen)

Most of these training possibilities for career guidance counsellors are also listed and described in more details at www.mevoc.net/DE/htm/fs.htm.

1.5 Requested quality certificates from the guidance institutions

Quality certificates like ISO, EFQM as well as the quality criteria of the TQM⁵ are based on industrial models. These certificates have in common that they are general conceptual frameworks and that they do not focus on career guidance in particular. Moreover, quality control based on these certificates mainly

⁵ TQM (Total Quality Management) was originally developed in the USA in the 1940ies and aims to establish quality and quality control as the principal system objective of an organization/company.

focuses on quality procedures rather than on the actual performance. For this and several other reasons they have been often criticized in the literature. Another particularly problematic aspect of trying to implement these quality models in the area of vocational guidance is the focus on the supply of service to clients. The clients of vocational guidance measures are often jobless, so applying the definition of client, the way it is used in the quality certificates, is not possible. The personal objectives of clients of the Public Employment Service are often subordinated to the objectives of the PES itself and therewith with the Austrian labour market policy. The main aim of each measure is to reintegrate the unemployed in the labour market due to economic reasons.

Another institution, which is important for certification, is the Academy for Continuing Education (wba- Weiterbildungsakademie, www.wba.or.at). This organisation, on the contrary to ISO, EFQM etc., only concentrates on certifying the quality of trainers working in the field of adult education. This certification and graduation of trainers is based on defined quality standards (a quality assurance curriculum). This curriculum includes 7 obligatory competences: didactics, management, philosophy of education, counseling, information management and librarianship, social and personnel competencies. In a first step trainers can collect their acquired competences and practical experience. They are then evaluated and accredited on the basis of the curriculum. Missing competences have to be additionally acquired. Once all competencies are accredited, the trainers get a wba-certificate. On the basis of this certificate it is possible to acquire a wba-diploma with 4 different focuses (teaching/ leading groups/ training, education management, counseling, librarians). The access to further university degrees is planned.

To ensure that wba-students are able to acquire their missing competences, different training institutions (11 up to this moment) founded the cooperative system of Austrian adult education. The supporting organisation is the "Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung St. Wolfgang" (www.bifeb.at).

Another effort to establish special quality standards for trainers is the European Career Guidance Certification (ECGC).⁶ The project started on November 2007 and ended in October 2009. Its main aim was to develop "a standardised and internationally transferable certification system ("ECGC-certificate") to acknowledge formally or non-formally acquired knowledge/skills/competences of career guidance counsellors that is compatible with existing training offers."⁷ To attain the certificate an online-test, an assessment centre and an exposition have to be successfully completed.

2 Quality programmes in continuous and further group training in Austria

Additionally to the quality certifications mentioned in chapter 1.4 and 1.5 some other quality programmes exist in Austria.

The department "work@education" of the Austria's Union of Salaried Private Sector Employees represents employees working in education, vocational training, and counselling. This department developed a quality programme in 2003, which deals with the establishment of definitions and quality criteria for trainers as well as for products used in training (e.g. training scripts). Within the project a platform for employed or self-employed trainers working in the field of education and counselling was developed in order to facilitate communication between trainers. The programme focuses on issues like quality criteria, training ethics, possibilities of quality assurance, the development of clear job profiles for trainers, improving the working situation of trainers etc.

Antonia Cicero and Alfred Fellingner are the initiators of the working group. They presented the results of their work on a conference organised by abif.⁸ A more detailed discussion of the results can be found in the above quoted report. The authors suggest the following measures to improve the quality of training:

⁶ www.ecgc.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=13 [15.3. 2010].

⁸ Karin Steiner, René Sturm (Hg.) – AMS Report 42 „Qual der Wahl im Info-Dschungel“, Beiträge zur Fachtagung „Qual der Wahl im Info-Dschungel – Möglichkeiten und Spannungsfelder in der Berufs- und Arbeitsmarktorientierung“, April, 30th 2004 in Vienna, page 58.

- Establishing, specification, and differentiation of job descriptions. According to the initiators, job descriptions of (vocational orientation) trainers are insufficiently elaborated and differentiated.
- Specifying the PES' selection and admission criteria for calls for tender and bids.
- Creating general conditions that enable trainers and training organisations to implement the quality criteria included in the calls for tender.

Another programme on quality standards was developed by the **Association of Adult Educations Centers (VÖV)** and was published a handbook in 1999.⁹ It consists of three parts: quality criteria, measures on quality development and assurance, and instruments on quality assurance and development. Each of these parts contains the subchapters "programme and pedagogical quality", "quality of staff", "quality of infrastructure", and "service quality". The first part on quality criteria explains the quality standards in general. In the second part on the measures it is specified how to implement these standards in training organisation. Finally, the part on instruments offers examples of feedback questionnaires, checklists, instruments assisting trainers in defining the educational needs of their participants, and information materials for trainers. Some instruments were especially developed for the handbook, whereas others have been already at least partly applied in different adult training centres (VHS).

The Association of Adult Education Centre (VÖV) has initiated another project called "network quality assurance" (Netzwerk Qualitätssicherung, <http://www.vhs.or.at/99/>). The project is based on the German model "LQW – Lernorientierte Qualitätstestierung in der Weiterbildung" which has been adapted to Austrian needs and conditions. Trainers from six different provinces have been trained as quality counsellors. Education centers who want to

⁹ Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen, Pädagogische Arbeits- und Forschungsstelle: Handbuch zur Qualitätsentwicklung an Österreichs Volkshochschulen. Vienna 1999

establish the quality assurance model can contact these quality counselors who will then assist them in the implementation phase. The network also works as a communication platform where the education centres can exchange their experiences with the model and support each other.

The "**Checklist Continuous Training**" is another project on quality in further training (<http://www.checklist-weiterbildung.at>). It offers quality criteria for participants who want to identify an appropriate training measures. This quality programme is published as a book but also accessible through a website financed by the bm:ukk (Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, www.bmukk.gv.at) and the ESF. It is based on the assumption that the quality of vocational training depends on individual expectations and goals of each of the participants. The first tool "My ultimate course" assists at defining these expectations. The second tool helps to provide more objective quality criteria, such as cost-performance ratio, qualification of trainers and adequate infrastructure. The mentioned homepage offers checklists for specific courses and groups, such as language courses, job finding, computer courses, e-learning, consumer protection, courses for disabled persons, and vocational certificates for adults.

There are also some other **networks and associations**, who deal with the question of quality assurance in guidance. For example the **professional association of Austrian career guidance counsellors** (VBB- Verband für Berufs- und Bildungsberatung, <http://www.berufsberater.at>). Next to working on quality assurance, networking and lobbying are also important fields of activities. The association has established a quality assurance programm which members have to apply to. For example, members are obligated to regularly attend further education, supervision and intervision. Moreover, they should be aware of their competences and responsibilities, as well of their limits and deficits.

Another example is the **association of education and career counsellors** (ÖVBBL- Vereinigung für Bildungs-, Berufs- und LaufbahnberaterInnen, <http://www.oevbbl.at>). It was founded in December 2007 and its main targets

are “professionalization, anchoring and facilitation of education and career guidance in society, economics, in national and European politics and research.”¹⁰ Their standards of quality assurance are similar to the above mentioned.

The Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training (ÖIBF- Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung, www.oeibf.at), has also developed an external quality assurance system for institutions that offer vocational counselling. The quality evaluation is based on the following 4 dimensions:

- Neutrality of the counselling service and how it exactly fits to the target groups;
- Reasonability of the counselling offers, the employees competences and how up to date the offered information is;
- Clearness and efficiency of design and organization of the offered services;
- Intern quality assurance systems and monitoring the effectiveness.

All 4 dimensions are assessed by a review team on the basis of 14 developed criteria and with the aid of an information-portfolio and a kind of “on-site inspection”. The members of the review team are recruited from a list of experts, who again have to fulfill special criteria.

3 Quality situation in guidance in group settings in Austria

Quality has different meanings, according to the perspective of the three different actors involved in the guidance process: PES, the training institutions and the trainers themselves. Next to the suppliers of training measures, also the clients, the participants of the trainings, and their perspective on the quality of the courses has to be considered.

¹⁰ Cp.: Grün, Gabriele (2009): National Research Report on the Guidance System in Austria., page 11.

What does the PES mean by quality? What do the training organization bidding for training measures, the trainers and the clients mean by quality? How can we assess the quality of a training course? Which criteria should we use? Who is developing these quality criteria? How can quality be measured and by whom?

According to the results of a project¹¹ carried out by abif on behalf of the Public Employment Service Vienna, the success of a course should not be only evaluated by taking into consideration how many percent of the participants managed to get a job in a certain period of time after its completion. It is important to take into consideration that the integration of e.g. mentally disabled people can take longer than the integration of people without health issues. The changes in the working world kept in mind. Thus, the trainers, who were interviewed in the framework of the above-mentioned project, emphasize that for measuring the success of a training course it is important to not only consider the typical forms of employment but also the atypical ones like e.g. freelance contracts.

The Public Employment Service evaluates the tenders for training measures according to certain quality criteria. It defines the rules according to which the training course has to be carried out. It e.g. defines the target group, the preconditions for the trainers, the setting for the course, the infrastructure, the training materials etc. Training institutions, which submit tenders, are assessed and receive points depending on how much requirements they meet. The organization, which got the most points, carries out the training measure.

3.1 Existing problems on the system and meta level

Several problems have a negative effect on the quality of guidance in group setting. For instance price dumping is one of the most serious problems. This is another result of the above mentioned project carried out by abif. Within this project the trainers were asked about the factors, which have an impact on the quality of the training courses.

¹¹ The project "Active Employment Policy in Occupational Orientation" (German: "Berufsorientierung im Fokus aktiver Arbeitsmarktpolitik") was carried out by abif on behalf of the PES Austria.

Many trainers were not satisfied with the selection process of the call for tender issued by the Public Employment Service. They expressed their fear that the submitted tenders are not evaluated according to the quality but to the lowest costs of the specific measures. The increased pricing pressure leads to a decrease in the remuneration of the trainers and to a precarious working situation (30-50% price as a major evaluation criterion).

This leads to another problem for the trainers: lack of time for preparation and follow-up of the courses, which again has a negative effect on the quality of the courses. The trainers' supervision and further education is also a factor that assures the quality of a training course. The trainers interviewed by abif stated that one way for the training organisations to save money is not offering any supervision and further education to the trainers. If the trainers want to attend seminars or courses, they have to fund them by themselves. As it might be difficult to raise money, they have to fall back to other strategies to develop their skills and competences, like training on the job, supervision and feedback given by their colleagues. Precarious labour market conditions, unsteady remuneration situation and at the same time problems with social security and employment stability are part of a trainers everyday life.

Taking a look at the calls for tender issued by the Public Employment Service abif has made the following considerations:

The calls for tender provide a clear description of the product (goals, topics, time schedule, target group), a defined evaluation criteria for submitted tenders and a clear qualification profile for trainers including both formal qualifications and experiences in the field of the training measure. The training institutions bidding for a specific call for tender have to prove the formal qualifications and experience in the field of the trainer to conduct the specific training measure. The interviewed trainers criticised the fact that - within the evaluating of the calls for tender - formal qualifications are overrated in comparison to work experience. Another question was how to deal with young trainers with academic degrees but little working experience. The interviewed trainers stated that young trainers should not be excluded due to their lack of work experience

because they need to make as much experience as possible; moreover, they bring in new, creative and innovative training methods.

The PES responded to these main criticisms. For example, the PES now acknowledges internships in the area of guidance as work experience. Like this, work experience of young trainers gained through internships is taken into account within the tender evaluation. Another solution would be to have two trainers in a course - one experienced trainer who conducts the course and a second young trainer who has less experience. Training institutions should also provide supervision for their young trainers.

According to the current evaluation scheme for training tenders of the Viennese PES, many different kinds of formal qualifications are accepted (a wide range of university degrees as well as non-academic education in vocational training and counseling).

Further solutions to the described problems are going to be presented in the chapter 3.2 "Suggestions by experts to improve the quality situation of guidance in group settings".

The communication between the different actors is another influential factor for the quality of trainings. As explained in section 1.2, the PES issues calls for the tenders for training measures. The training organisations are bidding. The trainers working for these training organisations carry out the trainings. Thus, the trainers are to ones, who get in direct contact with the clients.

There are various issues to be discussed concerning the communication. One problematic interface concerns the selection of clients for the trainings. The selection is done by employees of the PES, but the clients have to get well along with the trainer. A discrepancy in expectations, both from the part of the trainers and of the participants, can be a reason for conflict. Thus, the participants' expectations can differ from what the trainer can offer within the training schedule. This can happen from the beginning of the course as well as during the course. Two questions arise. Firstly, how can it be guaranteed that the course meets the participant's expectations from the very beginning, how

can the selection be organised so that the clients get exactly the trainings which they need and want. And the second question is how do deal with those participants who realise after the beginning of the course does the training does not suit their current situation.

The terms and conditions in the calls for tender are so strictly regulated that neither the training organisations, nor the trainers can adapt the content of a training measure to the individual needs of the participants in the courses. Who can change and adjust the contents of a training measure? The answers to all of these questions cannot be satisfactorily provided by the trainers or by the training organisations. Concluding, the communication between the PES, the training organisations and the trainers has to be improved. Possible solutions are to be found in the section 3.2 "Suggestions by experts to improve the quality situation of guidance in group setting".

3.2 Suggestions by experts to improve the quality situation of guidance in group settings

Based on expert interviews within the project "Active Employment Policy in Occupational Orientation " (German: "Berufsorientierung im Fokus aktiver Arbeitsmarktpolitik") carried out by abif on behalf of the PES Austria, the authors Andrea Egger, Elisabeth Simbürger, and Karin Steiner made the following suggestions to improve the quality of vocational and activation courses¹²:

- Increasing the use of modular course systems, in which the participants of vocational and activation courses have the possibility to participate. They can decide which modules they want to take part in and for how long. They also have the possibility to decide which tools they want to use. Another advantage of this modular teaching system is the reduction of redundancy of certain educational themes. In a vocational orientation

¹² Andrea Egger, Elisabeth Simbürger, Karin Steiner- - AMS report 37, „Berufsorientierung im Fokus aktiver Arbeitsmarktpolitik“, page 44-45.

training measure it should be avoided e.g. that the participants learn over and over again how to write a CV etc.

- The Public Employment Service should explain the placement aspect in more detail and should define specific and realistic placement quotas for each target group. Moreover, trainers need to know if the placement rate is the main course objective or if other aims are more or equally important. The realization of the placement quotas should also be more transparent: Who is responsible for the placement (trainers and/or PES employees)? What is a realistic placement rate for participants with specific problems (e.g. persons with social-psychological problems)? etc.
- The Public Employment Service should consider the general quality standards during the conception of the courses. The standards should be already described in details in the calls for tender.
- Another suggestion to improve the quality of the courses was to allocate a part of the budget to the trainers' supervision and further education.
- Integrate the trainers' potential and competences in the concept design in order to improve the quality.
- Information exchange and transparency was required by the training organisations. The continuous development of training measures can be only guaranteed by a strong co-operation between the Public Employment Service and the training organisations. Relevant information from recent reports and evaluations should be provided to the training organisations and trainers so that they can get a better picture of the situation, with which they have to deal with.
- The trainers believe that the Public Employment Service could improve the quality of the courses by assuring a better communication with both the trainers themselves and the course participants.
- It is very important that the trainers pay attention to the participants as a group as well as to the participants' individual needs in order to

respond to them. To provide a more individual approach, trainers could be supported by a second trainer who contributes new information from other fields of work as well as additional information needed by the participants.

- If some participants cannot integrate themselves in a training, it is necessary to initiate open and unrestricted communication with the PES and/or the course adviser. Subsequently, the Public Employment Service should try to find individual solutions and alternatives.
- The Public Employment Service should sufficiently inform the clients about the goals of the training, reasons and contents. The interviewed trainers said that they were sometimes confronted with clients that had not yet received any information on the courses and/or guidance from the PES. To quote the trainers, the PES advisers are often overloaded with work, and therefore they only inform their clients on a basic level without going much into further details.
- The trainers also suggested a more careful selection of the participants for a training course. The quality of a course can be increased when the participants have the same age, when they come from a similar social background and when they have a similar level of education.
- The contact between the Public Employment Service and its contractors is very important for the quality of the courses. To improve the co-operation between the contracting institutions and the PES, the PES Vienna established an annual meeting where PES employees and contracting institutions come together.

Not only the Public Employment Service can contribute to increased quality of the training courses, but also the training institutions can contribute:

- To quote the trainers the technical equipment and support are really important. The PES imposes certain preconditions by the call for tender. They should be supplemented by a better functionality of the technical

equipment. An ICT specialist should be available for the trainers to assist with technical questions and problems.

- The working situation of the trainers in the different training institutions should be improved. Two suggestions are that the training institutions either employ the trainers (employment contracts) or pay them sufficiently. Many trainers want to do supervision, intervision or to visit further education courses. They often have to pay these on their own. The question arises: how can a trainer, who is not satisfied with his own financial and working situation, motivate unemployed participants in a vocational orientation course?
- The working situation of the trainers is often described as precarious: low wages, no sick-leave, no right to paid holiday, no unemployment insurance a.s.o.
- One solution to improve the trainers' situation is to consider one hour of teaching as two working hours. Using this model the trainers would be able to consider much better the individual needs of the participants and they would also have time to prepare and follow-up the course. The training institutions should guarantee that the trainers are preparing and doing follow-up on the training courses.

Next to quality assuring activities of the PES and the contracting organisation, the trainers are also an important part to guarantee quality.

The interviewed trainers said trainers should learn to reduce stress and should work on their ability to deal with stress and pressure. This could be done by further education, supervision and intervision (feedback and guidance from peers). They should learn how to let go their work experiences during the day once they have reached home.

4 Existing quality standards in guidance in group settings

The Public Employment Service does not conduct the training measures themselves, but puts them out to tender and defines the selection criteria. The

calls for tender of the PES contain an exact description of the training measure, of the target group, and of the time schedule of the training (how many units, how long should each unit be etc.). Therewith the PES implicitly provides the quality standards for training measures.

In the following, the quality standards of a call for tender for vocational orientation and activation measure issued by the PES are described:

- Definition and selection of the target group
- Determination of the aims of the training course
- Determination of the time during which the training measure has to be carried out
- Trainer qualifications, experiences and competencies
- Materials, handouts to be used during the course
- Course setting (technical equipment, premises etc.)
- General quality measures applied within the course

4.1 Quality certificates used in Austria

As already mentioned there are no generally acknowledged quality certificates for the delivery of guidance in Austria. Some of them, who are used, are already described in section 1.5 "Requested quality certificates from the training institutions" and section 2 "Quality programmes in continuous and further group training in Austria".

4.2 Quality efforts or individual quality programmes by the initiators, training institutions or trainers' organizations

Programmes and projects to improve the quality of training are presented under section 1.5 "Requested quality certificates from the training institutions" and under section 2 "Quality programmes in continuous and further group training in Austria".

5 Important quality domains in scope of guidance measures with regards to the specific problems in Austria

In the following the most important quality domains for guidance in Austria are summed up:

- Focus on the contractor (mainly Public Employment Service):
 - Facilitating communication both with training institutions and trainers, especially as far as the development and improvement of the offered training measures are concerned.
 - The needs and interests of the participants should be taken into account, e.g. what kind of course they want to attend, for how long etc. They also should be better informed about the courses they are going to attend and why they can be helpful to them. This also has a positive impact on the participants' motivation.
 - The trainers' experiences should be used in order to continuously improve and adapt the course content. Moreover, the PES and the trainers should communicate on an ongoing basis.
 - Homogeneity is a main factor influencing the overall course quality. This should be considered when choosing participants for courses.
- Concerning the training institutions:
 - Provide better technical equipment and support during the courses.
 - Trainers mainly complain about bad payment, stressful and precarious work conditions, and insufficient supervision and further training.
- At the trainers' level:

- Because of their difficult work conditions, trainers also need to learn how to deal with stress and pressure at an individual level.

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