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GOOD PRACTICE IN THE VALIDATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN SWITZERLAND

The example of healthcare assistants

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1 COUNTRY, NAME OF THE INSTITUTION (AWARDING BODY OR PROVIDER)

The Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training, Switzerland

2 INSTITUTION'S WEBSITE ADDRESS

www.mba.ch.ch (website in German)

3 NAME AND LEVEL (NQF AND EQF) OF THE QUALIFICATION WHICH IS BEING VALIDATED

Healthcare assistant (EQF level 4, ISCED 2011 level 35)

The professional profile of the healthcare assistant is as follows (Canton of Zurich, 2017b, p. 21): 1) Healthcare assistants care for and look after clients in health and social care institutions on an inpatient and outpatient basis. They also perform various medical tasks in this context. 2) Healthcare assistants support the physical, social, and psychological well-being of persons of all ages in their environment and help shape their everyday experience. 3) Healthcare assistants provide administrative and logistical services and ensure interfaces to various service sectors. 4) Healthcare assistants establish and nurture respectful professional relationships with their clients and align their actions with client needs. They respect clients as individuals with individual value systems. 5) Healthcare assistants provide their services independently within the framework of their skills, legal guidelines, and institutional rules.

4 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE VALIDATION PROCEDURE

The validation procedure contains the following five phases: 1) The information and advising phase informs adults about the possibilities of having access to validation procedures, as well as about the whole process and gives them the opportunity to ask personal questions. 2) In the self-assessment phase, the candidates demonstrate that they meet the admission requirements and work out a validation portfolio by means of which they provide evidence of their already acquired professional competences and understanding of Language, Communication and Society (LCS)[1]. 3) In the assessment phase, two or three experts (for vocational and LCS subjects) assess the equivalence between the evidenced competences[2] and the competence profile set forth in the vocational education and training (VET) ordinance. The validation portfolio is complemented by an interview (between experts and candidates). The experts jointly write an assessment report for the attention of the examination committee, which is, in the canton of Zurich, the validation body. It is the same examination committee as the one who operates within the classical qualification procedure. 4) In the validation phase, the cantonal office in charge reviews the assessment report and issues a certification of the validated competences. It also specifies the supplementary training or the professional practice that the candidate still has to perform in order to obtain the qualification. 5) In the certification phase, the cantonal office issues a Federal VET Diploma once all the required competences have been validated.

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[1] LCS subjects are taught within the framework of VET programmes to acquire skills in the area of 'Language', 'Communication' and 'Society'. It has not to be confused with the term 'general education' that refers specifically to the academic subjects taught at baccalaureate schools, specialised schools and, to a much lesser extent, at federal vocational baccalaureate schools.

[2] The canton of Zurich (2017a, b) uses the term 'competences' instead of the term 'learning outcomes'.

5   DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICULAR PHASES OF THE VALIDATION PROCEDURE

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL) is one of four possible ways for adults to obtain a Federal VET Diploma, which is the initial formal qualification for healthcare assistants in Switzerland. To access the procedure, five years of work experience are required, at least three of which relating to the occupational field in question. Adults who chose the VNIL option do not take the final examination, but their qualification procedure consists in VNIL. The other ways are: a) enrolment in a VET programme (classical formal way); b) direct admission of experienced adults to the final examination without having to attend a VET programme; and, c) enrolment in a shortened VET programme if the adult is able to demonstrate his or her knowledge within the desired occupational field.

National Validation Guidelines for the Swiss VET sector were established in 2010 (OPET, 2010). These guidelines (currently under review) specify the following five phases of the validation procedure in Switzerland as shown in Figure 1 (see Salini & Voit, 2016, pp. 11-12). These five phases correspond, though with slight differences, to the phases involved in the European framework for validation. To date, 14 vocational qualifications can be attained through VNIL in various Swiss cantons.[3] The following sub chapters contain a detailed description of the particular phases of the validation procedure in the canton of Zurich, which is responsible for the validation procedure for healthcare assistants.

Phase 1: Information and advising

Phase 1 consists of two mandatory information events conducted by counsellors in the Office of Youth and Careers Guidance and a self-check, as well as a voluntary language test. At the first information event, interested parties receive information on how to obtain a Federal VET Diploma (as mentioned above four ways are available) as well as information on the validation procedure. In the canton of Zurich, first information events take place in groups approximately once a month. In addition, interested parties have the opportunity to make use of individual coaching services. They then log in to the validation tool and perform a mandatory self-check. The purpose of this is to check whether they meet the requirements in terms of 1) work experience (sample item: "I have gained enough work experience." *Information: To access the validation procedure, at least five years of work experience are required, at least three of which relating to the occupational field in question.*), 2) documentation of professional competences (sample item: "I am able to describe a professional situation in detail so that it becomes evident what my task looked like and how I performed it."), and 3) resources (sample item: "I regularly have time to work on the validation portfolio."). Candidates are asked to rate each statement on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Does not apply*, 2 = *Partially applies*, 3 = *Largely applies*, and 4 = *Applies.* It will also help them to decide if validation is the right way for them. At the second information event, interested candidates are given information on how best to compile the required validation portfolio. The individual components of the validation procedure (the self-assessment process, the various skill checks, admission to the validation procedure, and the validation tool) and various aids are discussed in detail. A language skills test (free online placement tests) is recommended, especially if the candidate's native language is not German. A B1 language level is needed to complete the validation procedure. After the second information event, candidates decide whether to participate in the

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[3] In total, 20 vocational qualifications are accessible through VNIL, but to date validation procedures are offered for 14 vocational qualifications.

validation procedure and pay the CHF 90 (EUR 77, as of Dec 2017) registration fee (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 4).

Phase 2: Self-assessment

Phase 2 consists of three steps: 1) admission to the validation procedure; 2) preparation of the validation portfolio; and 3) the submission of the validation portfolio.

Admission to the validation procedure

At the beginning of Phase 2, candidates use the online tool to submit an application for admission to the validation procedure. The application is assessed by the Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training. In order to be admitted to the validation procedure, they must have at least five years of work experience proven by means of certificates of employment or other evidence of employment, including three years in their chosen occupation. In addition, at the beginning of Phase 2, checks are performed to see whether the candidates have already completed any training for which credit can be awarded during the validation procedure. Attendance of vocational and/or LCS subjects can be applied. Which modules are accepted as previous training is determined by the cantonal professional organisation (i.e. OdASanté, www.odasante.ch) in cooperation with the Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training and published (for healthcare assistants, see Canton of Zurich, 2017b, pp. 89-92). If the candidates' documents are complete, they will receive notice within three weeks whether they have been admitted to the validation procedure and the credits they will receive for previous training. Even if the admission requirements have yet to be met, candidates can begin preparing their validation portfolios. However, they cannot submit their validation portfolio until they have complied with the admission requirements.

Preparing and submitting the validation portfolio

The VET ordinance, the training plan, and the competence profile describe all the professional competences that have to be documented in the validation portfolio. There are 22 modules required for healthcare assistants, two of which must be acquired through formal training or continuing education (for a list of modules see Canton of Zurich, 2017b, pp. 114-121). In addition to professional competences, LCS competences must also be documented (Canton of Zurich, 2017b, p. 30). First, candidates rate their own knowledge and experience for each module on a 4-point scale in the online tool. This self-check helps them prepare the validation portfolio and can be supplemented with a third-party assessment (e.g. the employer) on a voluntary basis. If a negative assessment is given, then supplementary training or on-the-job acquisition of skills is indicated for this module. If a positive assessment is given, it must be documented. In the Canton of Zurich, there are four options for demonstrating professional competences (so-called skill checks): 1) a written report of experience, 2) an oral report of experience, 3) an on-the-job visit, and 4) project and order documentation[4] (see Section 6). The last option is not available for healthcare assistants. Depending on the module, different skill checks are available (for healthcare assistants, see Canton of Zurich, 2017b, pp. 95-96). Some qualifications must be acquired formally, i.e. through formal training or continuing education at a recognised institution (e.g. the first aid module or the basic course in kinaesthetics for healthcare assistants). LCS competences can only be documented with a

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[4] A project and order documentation is the description of the professional and goal-oriented planning, execution and evaluation of a project or order that requires networked application of several competencies (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, p.25).

minimum of three written reports of experience. As evidence of skills, certificates of employment that make specific reference to certain professional competences may be submitted. Certificates showing training or continuing education and training or similar documents as support for credit being given for that skill may be submitted as well. They are to be assigned to the corresponding skill check in the validation tool (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 7).

Phase 3: Assessment

In the assessment phase, the submitted validation portfolio is read and assessed by two experts. If LCS competences are presented, three experts are involved in the assessment of the validation portfolio, including one expert for LCS subjects. The experts first assess the documented competences (skill checks) individually. Once they have assessed all skill checks, the candidate is invited to an assessment interview. The purpose of the assessment interview is to clarify ambiguities, e.g. with regard to wording in a written report of experience; to inquire about uncertainties, e.g. regarding a company's operating practices; and to verify whether the candidates have written the reports of experience themselves. The interview lasts 45 minutes. If LCS competences are also to be validated, it will last 60 minutes. The experts then prepare a report based on the assessment interview. The overall assessment of the individual skill checks is then determined jointly by the experts after the interview based on established assessment criteria. If the experts disagree, the chief expert of the occupational field will be called in. Once the overall assessment has been established, the experts prepare an assessment report. This will be reviewed by the chief expert and forwarded to the respective examination committee, which is an external body (see Section 11), as part of the candidate's application for validation. The detailed assessment can be viewed by the candidate during Phase 4 (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 30).

Phase 4: Validation

Phase 4 – Validation (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 33).

During validation, the examination committee reviews whether the assessment report appears correct and plausible (quality assurance). If the examination committee confirms the assessment report, a learning outcomes certificate is issued and sent to the candidate by post. It is valid for five years.The learning outcomes certificate indicates which modules have been assessed as fulfilled or not fulfilled. This step concludes the qualification procedure. Not fulfilled modules have to be completed by supplementary training within five years. Together with the learning outcomes certificate, candidates receive a list of recognised providers of supplementary training (for healthcare assistants, see Canton of Zurich, 2017b, p.122), where they can enrol in any outstanding modules (the supplementary training must be provided by a recognised provider). The supplementary training is aligned with the modules checked during the self-assessment phase, thus making it easy to identify which courses to enrol in. Each module of the supplementary training is completed by passing a test (oral, written, and/or practical) and may be repeated twice.

When candidates receive their learning outcomes certificate, they also receive a proposed time to view their files (one and a half hours). This allows them to review the overall assessment by the experts and to speak with the chief expert (to clarify any questions about the assessment, discuss options for supplementary training, and appeals). In addition, candidates will receive a

letter informing them about the next steps after they complete their supplementary training (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 33).

Phase 5: Certification

When all the required professional competences and LCS competences have been evidenced and accredited, the canton of the candidate issues a Federal VET Diploma in healthcare. There is no difference between this diploma and a diploma obtained through formal VET.
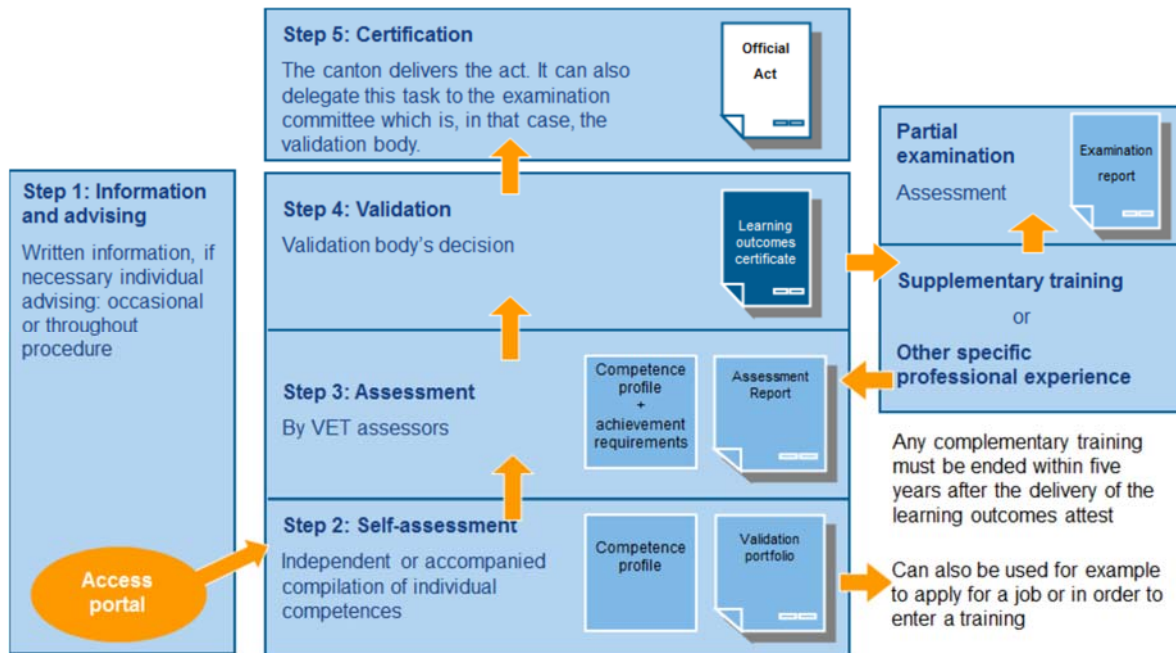

Figure 1: The five phases of a VNIL procedure in Switzerland in upper-secondary VET (OPET, 2010)

6   METHODS

Candidates rate their own knowledge and experience for each module during Phase 2 (self-assessment). This self-assessment is important because candidates are often unaware of competences they may have acquired informally and will help them as they prepare their validation portfolio. This may be supplemented by a voluntary third-party assessment that can be used as a supplementary document in addition to the skill checks (instead of a certificate of employment). In addition, the candidates have the opportunity to make use of individual coaching services as they prepare their validation portfolio. For candidates who live in the canton of Zurich and have no qualification at upper-secondary level, the individual coaching is free.

The documentation of prior learning is done online in the Canton of Zurich (through the online tool). In a validation portfolio, all professional competences and LCS competences must be documented. In the Canton of Zurich, there are currently four options for documenting professional competences (Canton of Zurich, 2017 a, pp. 13): 1) a written report of experience, 2) an oral report of experience, 3) an on-the-job visit, and 4) project and order documentation. The last option is not available for healthcare assistants. The LCS competences can only be documented with written reports of experience. A study conducted in the canton of Zurich (Wöhler & Senn, 2015) showed, that language requirements for preparing a written report of experience constituted a major obstacle for many validation candidates. Therefore, alternative

ways of demonstrating professional competences had been developed. The validation portfolio can be supplemented with supporting documents (e.g. certificates of employment, pictures). In Phase 3 (Assessment), an assessment interview with experts takes place after they have assessed the candidate's validation portfolio. The methods used in the canton of Zurich to identify, document, and assess competences are shown in Table 1.

Written report of experience

This is a collection of descriptions and documents showing what the candidate has learned in non-formal and informal contexts in relation to a specific module. To complete a module, one or more reports are needed. The written report always refers to a specific module.

Each written report has one or more concrete, written tasks. The tasks may differ: 1) Concrete task with content specifications (e.g., describe a concrete care situation and respond to specific questions relating to that situation). This task does not refer to the self-check in Phase 2, 2) Task with mandatory specifications, i.e. documentation of professional competences for which a positive assessment was given in the self-check in Phase 2, or 3) Open task (without specifications). The candidates use a concrete example to demonstrate that they have the required professional competences. They describe what they did, why they did it, and reflect on their actions. There are no specifications as to the length of these reports, although a length of three to four pages per task is recommended. The validation tool provides a template for writing the written report and also provides a sample report (Canton of Zurich, 2017b, p. 97). The assessment criteria are presented in a way that is clear for the candidates. Their chosen action, their description of what they did and why they did it, and their reflection on it are all assessed (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 13).

Oral report of experience

With an oral report of experience, candidates can present a module by means of the same tasks as with the written report of experience described above. The presentation consists of the same three elements: 1) description, 2) justification, and 3) reflection. Candidates have 30 minutes to present each task (20 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes to answer clarification questions). They may use presentation tools (such as PowerPoint, flipcharts, pin boards) as they like. The presentation dates are set up via the validation tool. There are two experts present for each oral report. Minutes of the presentation and of the conversation are kept by one of the experts. For the assessment, the same criteria apply as in the written report (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 17).

On-the-job visit

At an on-the-job visit, candidates can demonstrate specific professional competences on the job. An expert will make the assessment on-site. At the end of the visit, the expert will ask questions based on the assessment criteria and, if necessary, ask for clarification regarding the content. It is possible for several such visits to be scheduled. Anywhere from two to four modules can be assessed per visit. Each module requires a 30 minutes' observation (plus a maximum of 5 minutes for questions). Minutes of the visit are kept. The expert will make one assessment per module (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, pp. 21).

In order to conduct an on-the-job visit, the employer's consent must be obtained. Appointments are made via the validation tool. Before the start of the visit, a work plan must be prepared for the expert (a planning aid is available as a template).

Table 1: Methods used for the validation procedure of healthcare assistants in the canton of Zurich (2017a, pp.13)

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Self-assessment	X	X	
Third-party assessment	X	X	X
Individual coaching	X	X	
Written report of experience		X	X
Oral report of experience		X	X
On-the-job visit		X	X
Assessment interview			X

7   RESULTS OF THE VALIDATION PROCEDURE

A Federal VET Diploma (formal full qualification) will only be issued in Phase 5 once all required professional competences and LCS competences have been met and are accredited. Formal partial certification is, in principle, not possible.[5] Within the validation procedure, however, it is possible to be credited by course modules. This corresponds to a kind of partial certification. First, when admitted to the validation procedure (Phase 2, Chapter 5.2), checks are performed to see whether the candidates have already completed any training for which credit can be awarded during the validation procedure. Currently, it is not yet possible to credit non-formal and informal learning outcomes upon admission to the process. Appropriate efforts are, however, underway (Project "Standardised procedures for the validation and recognition of prior learning in the Canton of Zurich", http://www.sfivet.swiss/standardised_vnil_zh). Secondly, it is possible to have formal, non-formal, and informal learning outcomes credited during the validation procedure. In the validation phase (Phase 4, chapter 5.4), candidates receive a learning outcomes certificate, which shows the modules that have been validated and those that require further action to be taken. This learning outcomes certificate is valid for five years, but does not constitute a formal partial qualification. Together with the learning outcomes certificate, candidates receive 1) a list of recognised providers of supplementary training, 2) a proposed date to review their files and ask questions, and 3) a letter informing them about the next steps after they complete their supplementary training. In addition to the validation procedure, direct admission to the qualification procedure is another option for achieving a formal qualification (see Section 5). However, this is not validation in the strict sense, as no confirmation of the learning outcomes takes place.

8   COMPETENCES OF PRACTITIONERS CARRYING OUT VALIDATION

There are three main types of validation practitioners in Europe and in Switzerland (as well as in the canton of Zurich): 1) counsellors, 2) assessors, and 3) validation procedure administrators. Qualification requirements only concern assessors.

Counsellors are mainly involved in two phases of the validation procedure. The counsellors in the access services (counselling offices) are responsible for providing information and advice

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[5] Only if the exams are not passed after exhausting the opportunities to repeat them will a report be issued indicating which modules were passed and which ones were not.

in Phase 1 of the validation procedure. The counsellors in the services responsible for skills audits are responsible for conducting the mandatory information events in the Phase 2 (self-assessment). Counsellors are not involved in the assessment, validation, or certification phases. The counsellors have the appropriate qualifications (background in education, guidance and/or adult training), a strong understanding of VET, and sound knowledge of the process and its rules.

Experts from the cantonal examination body are primarily responsible for assessment in phase 3 of the validation procedure. They also assess oral reports of experience and on-the-job visits in Phase 2. These are persons who serve as examiners for the qualification procedure and have additionally completed a specific examiner training course in the validation and recognition of prior learning (similar to the training concept for examiners in other qualification procedures; EB Zürich & cbVA SA, 2006). They have a sound knowledge of VET (in particular of training objectives) and the qualification procedure (level of completion) in the respective occupation.

Validation procedure administrators are responsible for coordination of the whole validation procedure. They have a background as managers in the specific occupational field (Salini, Ghisla, Bonini, 2010).

Additionally, appropriately trained instructors provide the supplementary training. In addition, at all stages of the validation procedure, administrative work is done by clerks.

9   ORGANISATIONAL AND MATERIAL RESOURCES

Experience has shown that the entire validation procedure takes one and a half to three years to complete (Canton of Zurich, 2017a, p. 2). The time from the submission of the validation portfolio (at the end of phase 2) to the issuance of the learning outcomes certificate (phase 4) is about six months. Certification takes four to eight weeks (Canton of Zurich, 2017a). There are no consequences for candidates as drop-outs.

The Canton of Zurich uses an online tool (validation tool) to prepare the validation portfolio and assess the VET level of the candidate. This tool is accessible only after registration for the validation procedure (phase 2). For the self-check in Phase 1, an online questionnaire is used. This online questionnaire is integrated in the validation tool. In addition, two separated tools are used: 1) a tool (BISO) to document consultations and 2) a special software (Kompass) to archive the participants' data..

10   FUNDING

The funding of the validation practices in VET is connected to the general funding framework. According to Article 53 of the Federal Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA), the "other qualification procedures" are included in the federal lump sum subsidy that the cantons receive. This means that the validation procedures are funded with the same budget as VET programmes (i.e. formal VET) for young people.

Given that the validation procedure can be followed by an individual in a canton different from his/her canton of residence, the Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBKK) gives indications on inter-cantonal funding methods. Specifically, a person can follow validation procedures outside his/her canton of residence, whenever that canton does not offer a validation procedure for the selected occupation, or when there is a limited number of people for the procedure (CSFP/SBBK, 2007a).

It has been estimated on a national level that the average cost per person for a validation procedure at upper-secondary level VET including all the services is around CHF 7 000 (EUR 5 980, as of March 2012, updated numbers for the canton of Zurich are not available). This cost is clearly lower than the cost of a person attending a complete VET programme (CSFP/SBBK, 2007b). In 2010, a consultation with the various cantonal services produced an estimate of the average costs per person for each phase of the procedure (CSFP/SBBK; 2012, Salini, 2014). Based on those average costs, cantonal services established a maximum flat rate subsidy to be paid for each of the procedure phases when they sponsor the procedure. So far, these flat rates may not be cost-covering in the canton of Zurich anymore because extended advisory services end alternative ways of demonstrating skills have been established (an updated estimation for the canton of Zurich is not available).

The recommendations of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP/EDK) of 16 June 2005 (CDIP/EDK 2005) state that basic occupational, educational, and career guidance services are completely free of charge and that only the special or extended services can be charged to individuals. In this regard, the Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBBK) suggests that cantons should bear the costs of the entire procedure (including potential supplementary training) when the candidate does not hold any qualification. In case validation is used to get an additional qualification, a part of the costs can be charged to the candidate (OPET; 2010, CSFP/SBBK, 2007a & b).

In the canton of Zurich, phases 1 and 2 (information and counselling) are free of charge for persons who have no qualification at upper-secondary level. Phases 3 to 5 are also free of charge. When attending supplementary training, the module costs are subsidised up to 50% of the full costs.

11 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF VALIDATION

Article 8 of the VPETA specifies that education and training providers within the VPET system shall be responsible for ensuring the constant improvement of quality. The Confederation shall promote quality improvement, establish quality standards and monitor compliance. Based on this article, specific regulations for quality assurance of validation procedures for VET were issued in 2010 by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET)[6], in cooperation with CSFP/SBBK (SERI, 2018).

The Confederation is responsible for ensuring the quality of the whole system. It also has the duty to guarantee that regional and sectoral differences are protected. The Confederation also recognises cantonal procedures, competence profiles and criteria assessment for the various occupations.

The cantons are responsible for implementing qualification procedures. In particular, they have to: create the structures in line with national validation guidelines (OPET, 2010) and designate the services in charge; ensure the quality of qualification procedures, issue qualifications, set up the supplementary training, issue the federal qualifications, state legal procedures; and, participate in the ongoing development of qualification procedures. In addition, they have to establish the validation bodies that, in the canton of Zurich, are the examination committees who also operate within the classical qualification procedures. Each examination committee is comprised of a) representatives of the professional organisation representing the given

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[6] In 2013, the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) merged with the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) to become the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI).

economic branch and corresponding VET programme; b) representatives of the canton, and, c) representatives of the professional schools.

The Swiss Conference of VET Offices (CSFP/SBBK) is responsible for the coordination and exchange of experiences between cantons. Within it, a specific commission (i.e. the National CSFP/SBBK Commission for Vocational Qualifications for Adults) deals with the issue of validation.

Professional organisations are responsible for the content of the VET programmes. These organisations are structured on two levels: national and regional. At the regional level, these professional organisations are in charge of appointing the assessors (who are the same as those who operate within the traditional qualification procedures). At the national level, these professional organisations are in charge of defining the competence profile and the assessment criteria for the validation procedure.

A series of control lists for the various validation phases and activities are made available as review instruments for the 'Development and control of validation procedure quality' (OPET; 2010, SERI, 2018): 1) a control list for processing and developing competence profiles and assessment criteria, 2) a control list for the cantonal authorities that supervise vocational education and training, 3) a control list for the access services (counselling offices), 4) a control list for the services responsible for skills audits, 5) a control list for the experts of the cantonal assessment bodies, and 6) a control list for the services responsible for validation.

OPET commissioned a supervisory evaluation to ensure that all aspects of the pilot phase of the validation procedure in VET (2005-2009) could be examined (Wolf, Wilhelm, & Zuberbühler, 2009). This evaluation enabled a snapshot to be taken of the current situation, examined the effects of validation procedures and uncovered potential difficulties and development potential. In the canton of Zurich, an external evaluation took place in 2013. Specific VNIL quality control and development measures and instruments beyond national measures are in preparation and will soon be introduced.

12 INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is the Swiss federal government's specialised agency for national and international matters concerning education, research and innovation policy. The Confederation acts in a full regulatory capacity within the VPET system, in collaboration with the cantons and professional organisations. The Confederation sets the framework and secures part of the funding and promotion of VET. With regard to VNIL, it is responsible for quality control and further development of the overall system. The cantons implement and monitor VET programmes. They issue certifications on behalf of the federal government. With regard to VNIL, they are responsible for implementation and coordination of validation procedures. Professional organisations, including trade associations, are responsible for the development and content of training. With regard to VNIL, they establish the validation tools (competence profile, requirement profile for LCS, examination rules; Salini & Voit, 2016, pp.6, Salini, Petrini & Voit, 2012).

Each canton has an 'access portal to the service' that is also the centre for inter-institutional cooperation between the stakeholders involved in the validation procedure. In the canton of Zurich, this access portal is part of the Office of Youth and Careers Guidance, which is responsible for information and counselling during phase 1 and phase 2 of the validation procedure. The Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training is responsible for

preparing the basics (inter-occupational and occupation-specific), information and inquiries of the experts, information and inquiries of participants after submission of the validation portfolio, organising validation services, and providing advice regarding supplementary training and assessment of validation portfolios by assessment bodies. In both offices, employed staff correspond to 240% of a full-time workweek (as of Nov 2017). They work together with the Swiss German Exchange Panel for Access Portals as well as with the Swiss-German CSFP/SBBK Coordination Group for Vocational Qualifications for Adults and the National CSFP/SBBK Commission for Vocational Qualifications for Adults.

Historically, validation practices, initiatives or regulations – including the initiatives fostered by civil society, local organisations, NGOs and professional groups – have been developed through bottom-up and top-down approaches. They have mutually influenced each other and, owing to their continuous interaction, local and national projects have emerged at various levels of the education system and in professional contexts. So far, the development of Swiss VNIL practices can be characterised in four phases: 1) forerunner projects before the 1990s (mainly regarding recognition of prior learning, not validation); 2) pilot projects developed at local level in the 1990s; 3) dissemination of projects in the VET sector based on the VET Act of 2002 that became more institutionalised and scaled up to national level – since then, individuals with at least five years of work experience can apply for validation and receive a federal vocational qualification upon completion of the validation procedure; and, 4) restructuring of education policymaking bodies (from 2013) that led to the creation of the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). Within the programme texts that underlie this restructuring process, the principles of validation in all educational contexts are integrated. The aim is to increase permeability between education sectors and to remedy the lack of skilled workers in specific economic branches.

This progressive centralisation and institutionalisation of validation practices has modified the approach taken in the development of validation, from a bottom-up and decentralised approach, to a centralised and top-down approach. Consequently, most of the non-governmental partners, which promoted the validation practices in the past, are now confined to the periphery, because they cannot intervene in an official role in validation practices. This is because they are not part of the official bodies responsible for the procedures, although they may be consulted (Salini & Voit, 2016, pp. 4).

13 LIMITATIONS/ COMMENTS/ POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

Some obstacles to the further development of validation practices in Switzerland and in the canton of Zurich can be identified.

There remains a lack in knowledge of the validation procedure and rules in the workplace (employers) and in organisations supplying candidates.

Procedural information usually reaches the participants only during the course of the validation procedure; in the early stages, they usually have no idea what to expect.

There are dissimilarities across the regions and sectors regarding the possibility of obtaining a qualification via validation. The offer should be extended to other occupations as needed. It is important to note that the process is primarily suitable for people with work experience and not for lateral entrants. Secondly, care must be taken to ensure that no 'light' qualifications are produced, i.e. that existing vocational qualifications are not devalued by validation procedures, but that the level of competence is maintained.

Official centralised statistics regarding validation procedures, number of users and success rates are not fully available; although efforts have been undertaken in the Canton of Zurich to improve this aspect (see Section 11).

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