

AGROSKILL:

The system of non-formal learning, informal and formal learning in agriculture and the recognition and accreditation of competences in Germany and in the agricultural sector

The term "recognition" means both "acknowledgement" and "acceptance". This means that both documentation and certification are comprised in one term: particularly for countries with a highly formalised vocational training system such as Germany, recognition in the sense of entitlement means that it is associated with admission requirements, an external examination and the award of a certificate.¹

1. Recognition of formally acquired competences: regulated educational system

In the vocational training system in Germany, formal learning, which means initial vocational training, is of special importance: it builds the foundation of a professional career. It is possible in Germany to complete recognised vocational training (within the dual vocational training system) both at "school" and the "company" as learning locations and as full-time schooling. Further training and VET are of secondary importance when compared to initial vocational training. This means that the recognition of formally acquired competences receives greater acknowledgement on both a social and political level.

The federalist structuring of the education system also makes it extremely heterogeneous: the federal government is only responsible for the nation-wide design of vocational education. Occupational profiles are designed by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Economy in accordance with prior consultation and expertise of the social partners coordinated and supported by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education (BIBB). The implementation of the policies again is the responsibility of the Länder and therefore complicated. There are also numerous regulations on VET at the chamber of commerce level. Against this background, transfer opportunities within and between educational sectors pose a major challenge² which simultaneously impedes the development of recognition procedures.

In order to make qualification in Europe comparable (by using the system of the European Qualification Framework (EQF)) the federal government and the Länder have agreed in May 2013 to implement the German Qualification Framework (DQR). For all formal qualification programs the transfer from the EQF in the DQR is completed: All vocational training programs in the dual vocational training system (which last 3 and 3 ½ year) will be assigned to level 4 of the DQR. For the agricultural sector these are e.g. professions like "farmers" or "gardeners". Certificates for further training programs (1 year duration) like e. g. home economists, will be assigned to level 5 of the DQR. Advanced training programs, like the specific German certification as "Meister" or "Techniker", and

¹ See Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF (pub.)(2008): Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, Bonn, p. 9

²See Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF (pub.)(2008): Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, Bonn, p. 19

the Bachelor degrees are assigned to level 6 of the DQR. Master degrees are assigned to level 7 of the DQR and the doctor degrees to level 8.

Currently, there are public funded pilot projects in order to develop and test ways how to recognize and certify formally acquired competences on a further bachelor study. An example for the agricultural sector is currently undertaken in the project ANKOM (<http://ankom.his.de/>):

- A former vocational training degree (in the dual vocational training system) as "certified farmer", "certified gardener", "certified agricultural mechanist", etc. can be recognized on the 12 months traineeship which is a pre-requisite for the bachelor program in Agriculture.
- The further training program as a "certified agrar economist" can be recognized with 20-30 credit points for a university study in Agriculture.

If the learner can show these certificates, it will lead to the mentioned recognition, without any further individual testing ("across-the-board acknowledgement").

2. Recognition of non-formally acquired competences: unregulated vocational training system

According to the European Commission, non-formal learning is defined as follows:

"Non-formal learning concerns learning that takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher-relationships). It may cover programmes to impart work-skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers. Very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured online learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public."³

The agricultural sector offers numerous possibilities for VET, yet the range of training providers is unclear and their training content is not standardised. But for the agricultural sector, a website exist with all information about the vocational and educational training system in agriculture and a database where training institutes can present their qualification programs and training offers for the agricultural sector: www.bildungserveragrار.de.

Regarding recognition in Germany, although a series of parallel procedures exist which are anchored in law and associated with formal recognition, a central system based on uniform legislative provisions for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences do not exist in Germany. Instead, developments have mostly focused on the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal learning and its evaluation as an essential pre-requisite for recognition. Existing approaches at a political level have a comparatively narrow scope. An

³ European Commission (2012): Proposal for a council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Brussels, p.17

essential cause of the comparatively low significance of formal recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences appears to be rooted in the German system of vocational training and VET itself, which is largely integrated with the employment system and provides for progressive vocational development.

Currently, several working groups are developing proposals of ways how to integrate non-formal learning into the DQR. The working groups deliver proposals for the commercial, IT and management sector, for health care, etc. – but currently the agricultural sector is not included. The working groups deal with questions, like how to describe learning outcomes, the meaning of workload, methods of competence assessments, quality assurance, etc.

In general, there is the possibility that learners can try on an individual way for acknowledgement of former competences for a non-formal qualification program. It depends on the regulation of the training organization and their specific program. In this case the learners normally need to show documents of non-formal certificates, references from employers, assessment results or work samples which documents the competences. In case that the training institutions recognize the former competences, they mostly offer some kind of reduced programs for the learner.

3. Recognition of informally acquired competences

A study conducted by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF 2004) discovered that in 2003, a total of 51 different forms of passports were available to record competences and informal learning. These passports are intended to document qualifications and activities which play a role in recruitment and further professional development.

In addition to these effective procedures in the education system and on the labour market and also to programmes initiated under education policy, there are arrangements under collectively agreed settlements and company procedures that are applied on the labour market but are not associated with admission into the education system and formal recognition.⁴ Unfortunately, no example was provided regarding the agricultural sector, yet the procedures explained below could also apply to this sector.

Some examples of the certification of competences

a) Procedures in the vocational training

Recognition of informal competences by means of an external students' examination⁵

Admission to an examination within the framework of external regulations is aimed primarily at unskilled and semi-skilled workers to allow them to gain

⁴ Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF (pub.)(2008): Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany, Bonn,p. 13

⁵ more information see: <http://www.perspektive-berufsabschluss.de/de/501.php>

vocational qualifications, which means obtaining formal acknowledgement in order to find employment in specific sectors since it is most often trained professionals who are recruited as the trend towards unskilled workers dwindles. Regulations concerning participation in external students' examinations according to § 45 (2) BBiG (Vocational Training Act) and § 37 (2) HwO (Crafts Code) follow: the candidate must have sufficient work experience which corresponds to 1.5 times the duration of training for a standard vocation, meaning approximately 5 years. The minimum period of time may be waived if the candidate can demonstrate that he/she has acquired vocational competence that justifies admission to the examination. Training periods in another relevant apprenticeship trade also count as periods of employment. Those without documentation of the competences they have informally acquired cannot be admitted to an external students' examination. In the future, procedures to ascertain competences must be developed which can document such informal competences. Only then will it be possible for this target group to have access to external students' examinations.

b)Steps and programmes to prepare for recognition

Procedures exist that are only partially legally regulated which appreciate or recognise informal learning. This applies particularly when companies accord certified qualifications and competences only limited significance in staff selection and are unable to recruit sufficient junior staff from formal and non-formal educational pathways.

ProfilPASS

ProfilPASS is an instrument which allows individuals to illustrate the competences acquired throughout their biography based on self-assessment. This is performed with guidance from trained advisors in eight proposed fields of activity. In this process, special attention is given to informally acquired competences. The result of the process is an individual record of competences as a starting point for further activities. The ProfilPASS system is composed of the "ProfilPASS" instrument and an advisory system which is coordinated to the instrument that, inter alia, proceeds in a biographical manner.

Effective recognition of work experience by means of collective agreements

The conclusion of collective agreements offers a possibility for recognising work experience and competences. Social partners have established regulations within collective agreements in some branches and occupational groups. Experience is then equated with a vocational qualification which translates into the adjustment of salary groups. For example, an employee in salary group 1 is then reclassified based on experience which begins in salary group 1.1 and increases to 1.2, 1.3.⁶ For the agricultural branch this kind of collective agreement doesn't exist.

⁶ In the "collective agreement remuneration framework (ERA-TV)" of the metal and electrical industry in Baden-Württemberg, the classification under the collective agreement relates to the duties of the job. In accordance, it is immaterial how the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities were acquired. Instead, the key competences efficiency, quality, flexibility, responsible behaviour, co-operation and leadership are recorded.