

How to inter-connect European and national levels and enhance compatibility of national systems with the European one?

The situation and nature of eco-counselling is different in different countries. That is why this handbook defines European standards as:

- the proposal of possible criteria and conditions for individual aspects of eco-counselling: methods, human resources and knowledge base, processes, ethics, etc.
- the proposal of possible tools for control and evaluation

This set of criteria and evaluation tools can be modified according to national conditions. Such implementation consists of the following steps:

- selection of suitable criteria for relevant aspects
- choosing of proper tools for the control and evaluation of each criterion
- according to the tools for control, measurable parameters have to be chosen and their minimal or optimal value has to be set
- agreement on these standards at national level

Handbook describes the needs and requirements to be met by the curriculum of vocational training and by the courses in the future. Main messages which open door for elaboration of the curriculum are as follows:

- common European framework which can be easily adapted to the specific needs of the different European countries
- flexible approach reflecting different levels and requirements
- accent on the skills and methods
- contact with practice.

Prepared by Kamila Kanichová (STEP), Christian Schrefel (ECE) and the other members of the “Quality Standards of Vocational Training for Eco-Counselling” project team.



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Leonardo da Vinci

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QUALITY STANDARDS FOR ECO-COUNSELLING IN EUROPE

ADDENDUM

From the analysis via quality standards to training concepts

Motto:

AN ECO-COUNSELLOR SHOULD KNOW
SOMETHING ABOUT EVERYTHING
AND EVERYTHING ABOUT SOMETHING

The handbook presents quality standards for eco-counselling in Europe and summarizes results of common work on their definition within the “Quality Standards of Vocational Training for Eco-Counselling” project.

At the beginning there was an aim to develop quality standards of eco-counselling according to the perspectives and principals of gender mainstreaming and sustainable development and regarding the needs of the participating countries. Three main areas were supposed to be covered by following standards:

- Standards for environmental content (ecology, European environmental law, eco-labelling, green procurement, waste, energy and water management, bio-farming, sustainable consumption...).
- Standards for social and communicative competences (systemic analysis and advisory, management of knowledge and information, eco-communication and marketing, adult education, ...).
- Standards for competences in methods (rhetoric, project management, event management, presentations, media work, ...).

Quality standards present the pillar of the bridge between the analysis of the demands and status quo of eco-counselling in Europe and the curriculum - vocational training concepts for the eco-counsellors.

The quality standards should be also a milestone on the way to obtaining acceptance and to the establishment of the job profile of "Eco-Counsellor".

Two main inputs for the handbook were results of the Analysis¹ and mainly common facilitated discussion of the project team.

The Analysis of the demands and status of eco-counselling in Europe was focused on the national umbrella organisations, the job profile of eco-counsellor and the offer of trainings for eco-counsellors. It says, for example, that the environmental topics and target groups are quite different from one country to another: from environmental awareness for households in Hungary and Austria to environmental management systems for public authorities in Belgium and France. More and more eco-counsellors are addressing not only the environmental pillar of sustainable development, but also the social and economic pillars. The analysis concludes that there is a strong need for harmonisation in the curricula of vocational training institutes, sharing working practices and enhancing cross-border cooperation activities, getting official public recognition.

- Common facilitated face-to-face discussions were the most important input for the creation of the standards. European scale of the discussions was enhanced by participation of eco-counsellors and eco-counselling associations from

eight different countries as well as the Eco-Counselling Europe (European-wide association). Within these discussions questions like "Two things a good eco-counsellor should have? One or two moments when an eco-counsellor just went over the edge?" were asked. By answering these questions, discussing and explaining answers and sorting results our transnational project team formulated fields for standards, different standards belonging to these fields and the structure of the future handbook of standards. Small teams for elaborating constituent parts of the handbook were established too.

The whole our work was also affected by the fact that an eco-counsellor was a new profession. First eco-counsellors started their job in the 80th. This profession is in the development, with more or less no solid background. To prepare quality standards and vocational training concepts is not so clear and easy as for common professions with long-term history like teacher, cook, plumber or doctor. We were creating something really new what hasn't been done yet.

We realised that eco-counselling had many different faces as the conditions are different in every country. Our main goal was to prepare **common European standards**, but in a way which takes into account specifics of different countries. The strategy adopted for the handbook was: to have common minimum standards which were deeply and carefully discussed during meeting and which are result of really **COMMON, EUROPEAN, TRANSNATIONAL** work and at the same time to keep possibility for national adaptations.

"One example says more than thousand words." This is another approach used when preparing handbook. Examples are used in addition to the general description of methods to explain them more in detail or they are used as starting-points being summarized and generalized at the end (in case of quality management systems). Using of examples is also an effective way to make handbook more attractive and readable for eco-counsellors and other important stakeholders in different countries.

Unifying aspects which became to be base ideas for preparation of standards were: in case of environmental content, eco-counsellor has general knowledge with special expert extension and orientation in one or more fields; preventive approaches and solutions and integration of the environment in all sectors. Next common links are main type of target groups and methods used. Thus, eco-counselling represents common European-wide approach with unique variability of application for different topics, tasks and target groups.

¹ Analysis of Eco-counselling networks, job profiles and vocational trainings in Europe, "EcoStands For" project partners, December 2005