

Conference

on 21 September 2009 in Berlin

Tools for Assessing the Competencies of Volunteers – What Works for Whom and in Which Context?



Report

An event organized in cooperation with the Working Group 2 on Qualifications and Education of the *Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (BBE)* and the *Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland*

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Notice:

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On 21 September 2009, the German Association of Public and Private Welfare in Berlin hosted a conference entitled "Tools for Assessing the Competencies of Volunteers – What Works for Whom and in Which Context." The event was collectively organized by the Working Group 2 on Qualifications and Education of the *Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement – BBE* (National Network for Civil Society), the *Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland* (German Academy for Volunteer Work) and the *Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik – ISS* (Institute for Social Work and Social Education). These groups met to provide insights into various methods for assessing competencies in the area of volunteer work.

This report presents the main contents and results of the conference. It offers an introduction to the topic of assessing competencies in civil volunteer work and can serve as an initial orientation for all interested parties. The overviews of the four methods for assessing competencies are based primarily on the presentations made by the speakers, who we would now like to sincerely thank: Dr. Andrea Reupold (*University of Munich*), Wolfram Hafner (*ProfilPASS-Dialogzentrum, Kolleg für Management und Gestaltung nachhaltiger Entwicklung gGmbH*) and Hanna Beier and Tanja Sauter (*Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg*).

1 Summary

The conference focused on four selected methods for assessing competencies that are used in the area of civil volunteer work. Three of these methods – the Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work, the Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services and the Qualipass – were specifically developed for the area of volunteer work, while a fourth one, the ProfilPASS system, focuses on the area of volunteer work as one of a wide range of informal learning venues.

Practice-oriented presentations highlighted the goals, areas of application and approaches used in these methods. Speakers discussed what resources each of the methods require and dealt with the issue of their suitability for specific user groups. Based on the four input presentations, the conference took an initial step towards answering the question of which method "works for whom and in which context."

During the subsequent debate, participants discussed this issue in greater depth, primarily with regard to motives, goals and selection criteria.

From the viewpoint of the organizations, the main focus was on promoting a culture of recognition, fostering opportunities for presenting themselves to the outside world, and boosting the motivation of volunteers. From the perspective of the volunteers themselves, the main emphasis was on promoting personal development and documenting acquired skills and competencies.

A variety of methods for assessing competencies was viewed as fundamentally effective. There was a consensus that the participants had no intention of identifying "the best, universal method." It is possible instead to consider different approaches, depending on the concrete objectives and the user group.

When the discussion turned to the criteria for selecting a method of assessment, participants addressed such aspects as the manageable use of resources, the ability to readily convey their message internally and externally, target group effectiveness and certification.

As a whole, the conference demonstrated that within the diverse areas of civil volunteer work there is currently intense interest in methods for assessing competencies, and the issue is being examined with a great deal of curiosity and openness.

Despite a number of individual pitfalls that were discussed during the debate, such as the danger that the intrinsic value of volunteer work could be devalued in favor of the

logic of the labor market, the vast majority of participants had a positive outlook and methods for assessing competencies are seen as an excellent opportunity for civil volunteer work.

It was also clear though that many issues still have to be resolved. The participants at the conference voiced an interest in conducting a more in-depth examination of individual areas and, among other things, expressed a desire to become acquainted with additional methods for assessing competencies. In addition, they expressed a need to discuss aspects of recognition and certification in a dialogue with employers, business and industry.



2 Welcome and introduction to the topic of assessing competencies in civil volunteer work

The conference was opened by Thomas Kegel from the *Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland*. He stressed that experts have only recently begun to address the topic of acquiring competencies in civil volunteer work, and the conference is one of the first events focusing on this issue. The main objective is to gain a comparative overview of selected methods and processes for assessing competencies.

Andreas Pautzke, deputy chairman of the BBE, underscored the current relevance of the topic. He emphasized the great importance of the topic for the area of volunteer work and the considerable demand for methods that can be used to assess competencies.

Susanne Rindt, director of the "*Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent*" project office subsequently provided an introduction to the topic:



Informal learning & lifelong learning

Acquiring competencies in civil volunteer work can be linked to the general debate on education, where the importance of informal learning has been intensively discussed for quite some time now.

The term 'informal learning' or 'learning in informal contexts' describes learning processes that occur in a more or less unplanned manner in settings or situations where the learning is subject to no formal conditions, i.e., where it adheres to neither a curriculum nor examination rules. Most of the important competencies in professional and private life are acquired informally. In 1972, the UNESCO Faure Commission came to the conclusion that 70% of all our learning occurs during informal processes. Informal learning takes place everywhere – in the family, in other social settings, at the workplace, via the Internet, through books, but also within formal educational institutions.

International debate has generated decisive momentum for the educational and political paradigm shift towards informal learning. In 1996, the UNESCO Delors Commission pointed to people's idle skills potentials and the need to mobilize these abilities. It advocated a change in course away from pure knowledge-dominated learning towards learning that develops competencies.

During that same year, the OECD ministers of education proclaimed the guiding educational goal of "lifelong learning for everyone" as a response to a comprehensive structural transition that encompasses all areas of life and has a corresponding impact on the working world and concrete work processes. In the year 2000, the European Council confirmed this paradigm shift in the Lisbon Resolution and indicated that the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society must include an orientation towards lifelong learning for everyone. The systems of education and vocational education in Europe must undergo a corresponding reform.

In 2008, this led to the creation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which aims to harmonize national qualifications across Europe and make them transparent. Within Germany the EQF is implemented via the German Qualification Framework (GQF). It currently remains relatively unclear how – and with what tools and what status – informally acquired competencies can be integrated using these frameworks. The openness of the situation should nevertheless present an opportunity for the certification of competencies that are demonstrated or acquired during volunteer work.

Key competencies and the working world

The innovation and competitiveness of businesses depends increasingly on how they deal with the challenges of lifelong learning, and how they foster learning abilities at the level of employees and throughout the entire organization. At the same time, key qualifications and social competencies are becoming increasingly important. Nowadays companies generally face the challenge of finding appropriate ways to enhance their in-company concepts for personnel recruitment and development along with training and continuing education measures. In the future, there will be a

focus on improved or acquired competencies in all walks of life within this particular context – including in the context of volunteer work. When it comes to implementing this approach, however, only initial steps have been taken.

In the future, competencies certificates could evolve to become an effective tool for personnel decisions. In order to make this possible, however, externally issued competencies certificates and assessments must be meaningful, transparent, well-known and recognized. With the exception of a number of regionally-issued volunteer certificates (for example, the Qualipass for young people in Baden-Württemberg and a few certificates issued by German states), a great deal still needs to be done with regard to the prominence and prevalence of these documents. In the future, it will also be necessary to devote significantly more attention to the quality of competencies certificates and the methods used to issue them.

Key competencies and gainful employment are also closely linked beyond the primary labor market, as revealed by a glance at today's vocational preparation and guidance programs for young people as well as initiatives to support disadvantaged youth. In this area, methods to document competencies serve as important tools for initiatives aimed at vocational orientation and preparation. Methods such as Assessment-Center, MELBA and DIA-TRAIN are starting points for broader services to support the transition from training to pursuing a career.

Certifying competencies in civil volunteer work: opportunities and pitfalls

Volunteers increasingly want to make active use of competencies and qualifications acquired during their volunteer work, particularly in transitional situations between school, training and a career, between individual vocational phases, when returning to professional life after parental leave or after periods of unemployment, and so on. In order to ease this transition, they need competencies certificates that are also part of the culture of recognition in the field of volunteer work.

Should volunteers increasingly begin to ask for competencies certificates, it will become necessary to create corresponding offers within the context of volunteer management. In addition to selecting a competencies certification process tailored to the needs of the area and target group, careful consideration should also be given to the consequences for individual organizations. Many associations and small organizations have work processes that are highly dependent on volunteer work, and these groups often fear that they will be overwhelmed by a heavier workload. Feasible models thus have to be identified and the respective framework conditions need to be further developed in an appropriate manner. This would have to be complemented by suitable vocational counseling and continued education offers.

These proposals have prompted criticism from a number of youth organizations – and to some extent also from the organizations in charge of youth voluntary services – who say that such an approach would limit self-determined and self-organized educational processes to the detriment of volunteers and organizations because competencies would be certified and thus also standardized. Within this context there will have to be further serious discussions on the issue of the personal value and meaning of volunteer work.

Critics often insist that volunteer work should not be exploited to meet the needs and logic of the labor market – and this is an issue that primarily concerns volunteers from educationally or socially disadvantaged groups, whose potential for voluntary involvement needs to be more effectively mobilized in the future. Acquiring competencies through volunteer work is of particular use to people with a low level of formal education. It is hoped that volunteer work will pave the way for them to enter the primary labor market.

There is no doubt that volunteer work is educationally highly effective in the sense that it allows individuals to acquire competencies and fosters personal development. It remains to be seen, however, if volunteer work will have the desired effect on the labor market. In any case, it is important not to overload volunteer work with expectations or to expect it to make up for the consequences of failed educational policies. This also holds true for competencies certificates. When debating this issue, it is important not to lose sight of another dimension, namely the opportunity to participate in society, which is also, but certainly not exclusively, defined through gainful employment.

Clarifying the terminology used

Existing competencies certificates and methods for assessing competencies have arisen from an extremely wide array of programs and projects, many of which are publicly funded. There is still a lack of a comparative overview. Critics contend that there is a great deal of confusion surrounding the different methods, and one explanation for this state of affairs is the current ambiguous use of terminology, where various approaches are mixed together.

On the one hand, there are volunteer certificates, a category which includes most of the certificates issued by German states. These certificates verify that individuals are currently volunteering or have completed volunteer work and are thus primarily an expression of appreciation and recognition for their involvement. Such documents generally say very little about concrete personal or social competencies.

On the other hand, there are competencies certificates that express recognition for an individual's involvement, but also make qualified statements concerning the

volunteer's personal and social competencies. This can be accomplished by documenting and assessing informally acquired competencies. Self-reflection is a key aspect of this process. Every volunteer actively and intensively assesses his or her own activities, learning experiences and competencies. The volunteers often offer viewpoints that are biographical in nature, i.e., that focus on the wide range of human experience, including family life. Methods for assessing competencies consist of a self-assessment and an external assessment, and these can be organized in diverse ways. Both are subsequently assessed in different ways, either with or without external facilitation or pedagogical supervision.

The result is a document called a competencies certificate. This can be complemented by additional documents, for example, course transcripts and qualifications. All of this is compiled to form a portfolio that, in part or in its entirety, can be used for job applications.

Methods for assessing competencies include the DJI's Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work, the ProfilPASS, the Qualipass, the Cultural Competencies Certificate and the Youthpass. The organization of these methods as well as their products (competencies certificates, competencies portfolios) varies in some cases significantly.

Looking ahead

Today's range of competencies certificates and processes for assessing competencies reflect the variety of contexts in which they were created and the diverse sources of funding, approaches, objectives and target groups. This creates confusion and requires sorting and weighting. At the same time, however, this variety also stands for the value that is attributed to informal learning in various contexts of civil volunteer work. It reflects the different contexts where volunteer work is done (social, cultural, educational and environmental areas) as well as the current differences in terms of resources (financial and human resources, proportion of full-time vs. volunteer positions).

The task at hand will now consist of gaining an overview by examining and comparing existing approaches. Furthermore, an emphasis should be placed on enhancing the quality of existing methods. Third, – as was proposed at the National Forum for Involvement and Participation – more must be done to get the message across to users (schools, institutions for adult education, nonprofit organizations and volunteers themselves) as well as to employers in companies and organizations that certifying informally acquired competencies opens up a wide range of opportunities for everyone involved.

3 Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work (*Kompetenzbilanz aus Freiwilligen-Engagement*)

Overview of the process

- Designed to be used by volunteers of all ages
- Self-directed process without supervision
- Observation of the selected area of life connected to the volunteer work
- Focus on informally acquired competencies
- Process: understanding one's life history as a learning history – identifying learning venues and activities – pinpointing the competencies used at that time (list of possible competencies available for orientation) – appraisal of these competencies
- Self-assessment and external assessment
- Self-issued certificate at the end of the process (short description of the activities, list of acquired competencies)
- Materials: an instructional manual with forms to be filled out can be downloaded (www.dji.de)

Speaker: Dr. Andrea Reupold, University of Munich, contact: reupold@lmu.de

Dr. Andrea Reupold from the University of Munich presented the Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work. This method was developed between 2004 in 2006 as part of the research project entitled "*Kompetenznachweis Lernen im sozialen Umfeld*" ("Competencies Certificate: Learning in a Social Environment"). The project was jointly conducted by the *Deutsches Jugendinstitut – DJI* (German Youth Institute) and the *KAB-Institut für Fortbildung und angewandte Sozialethik – kifas gGmbH* (Institute of the Catholic Workers' Movement for Continuing Education and Applied Social Ethics). It was a subproject of the program section "*Lernen im sozialen Umfeld – LisU*" and was funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research and the European Social Fund.

The main objective of the project was to raise awareness among individuals, the general public and companies of the social environment as an informal learning venue. It aimed to draw a clearer connection between competencies gained in the social environment and their use in a professional context. The area of voluntary work was the main focus of consideration here. It is recognized as a key learning venue and the goal was to enhance its status by focusing on the competencies that are acquired or demonstrated there.

The process was developed in a number of stages. Participants included experts from companies (human resources, works councils or employees involved in the social environment) and organizations in the social environment (associations, initiatives, volunteer centers etc.) as well as volunteers from diverse fields of activity.

Goals and areas of application

The Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work aims to document and draw attention to competencies that have been acquired in various fields of activity within the area of volunteer work. This transparency should ideally go hand-in-hand with the possibility of assessing the competencies. The idea is to acknowledge them and support their transfer to other areas.

This assessment method was especially developed for the area of volunteer work, where it can be applied in various fields. It is also conceivable that this approach to assessing competencies could be applied to other areas of informal learning.

Target groups

The Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work is generally directed towards those individuals who would like to document and draw attention to the competencies that they have acquired during voluntary work. Coming to terms with their own strengths and competencies can be important for volunteers initially out of an interest in their own personal development, but it can also take place with regard to the continuing professional development of a volunteer. This addresses the needs of individuals who are in a phase of professional reorientation, who are changing careers, or who are about to (re)launch a professional career. The process of self-reflection associated with this method can also be helpful for special work-related situations, for example, when preparing for an upcoming performance review.

An essential prerequisite for this approach is the ability to conduct a self-assessment and engage in self-reflection. This can limit the scope of the user group to a certain degree, as has been confirmed during tests of the method. For instance, young people in youth social work programs have considerable difficulties coming to terms with the process. In contexts with educationally and socially disadvantaged groups, it may be necessary to provide additional counseling and supervision when using this method.

Additional target groups for the process include private and public sector companies, and organizations and administrations that have an interest in recognizing competencies gained from volunteer work and using these, for example, when making personnel decisions.

Finally, the Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work is directed at organizations that have an interest in developing the competencies of their employees who are involved in volunteer work. This can serve a wide range of objectives. It can, for instance, be used to provide special incentives for the volunteer work, ensure more suitable placements of volunteers, or form the basis for guidance and continuing education in volunteer work.

Requirements and necessary resources

The Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work is a self-directed process based on self-reflection. This method requires no special counseling structures or supervision. All that is required to get started is the instructional manual.¹

In addition to the folder and the working materials, sufficient time is required to implement the process. During the testing phase, the processing time of 1.5 to 2 hours proved to be realistic. At least three hours are recommended in the instructions.

There are training and coaching offers available for companies that want to use the competencies assessment for their human resources work. These materials also address the needs of organizations in the area of volunteer work. Such coaching is optional and is not a required element for an introduction to using the method.²

Steps and key elements of the method

The Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work consists of three important areas that determine the course of the process:

- Individual portfolio process
- Creating a pool of competencies
- Targeting a selection of competencies

The personal portfolio process begins with the creation of an initial overview of one's own volunteer work. Here is where the individual lists all activities to date in the area of volunteer work.

¹ This assessment along with support material and a sample of the competencies documentation are available as a free download or can be ordered on a CD for €5.50 from Kifas gGmbH (<http://www.dji.de/cgi-bin/projekte/output.php?projekt=354&Jump1=LINKS&Jump2=67>).

² Information on this can be obtained from kifas gGmbH (<http://www.kifas.org/index.php?browse=projekte&showpro=8&show=20>).

In the next step, the current main field of activity is more closely examined along with its working conditions. This is done with the help of a two-page questionnaire featuring open questions that focus on things such as the organization and structure of the area of responsibility and the motivation for getting involved.

In the third step, learning experiences are derived from the various activities. This is where a mind map is used to help pinpoint the competencies acquired during each individual activity.

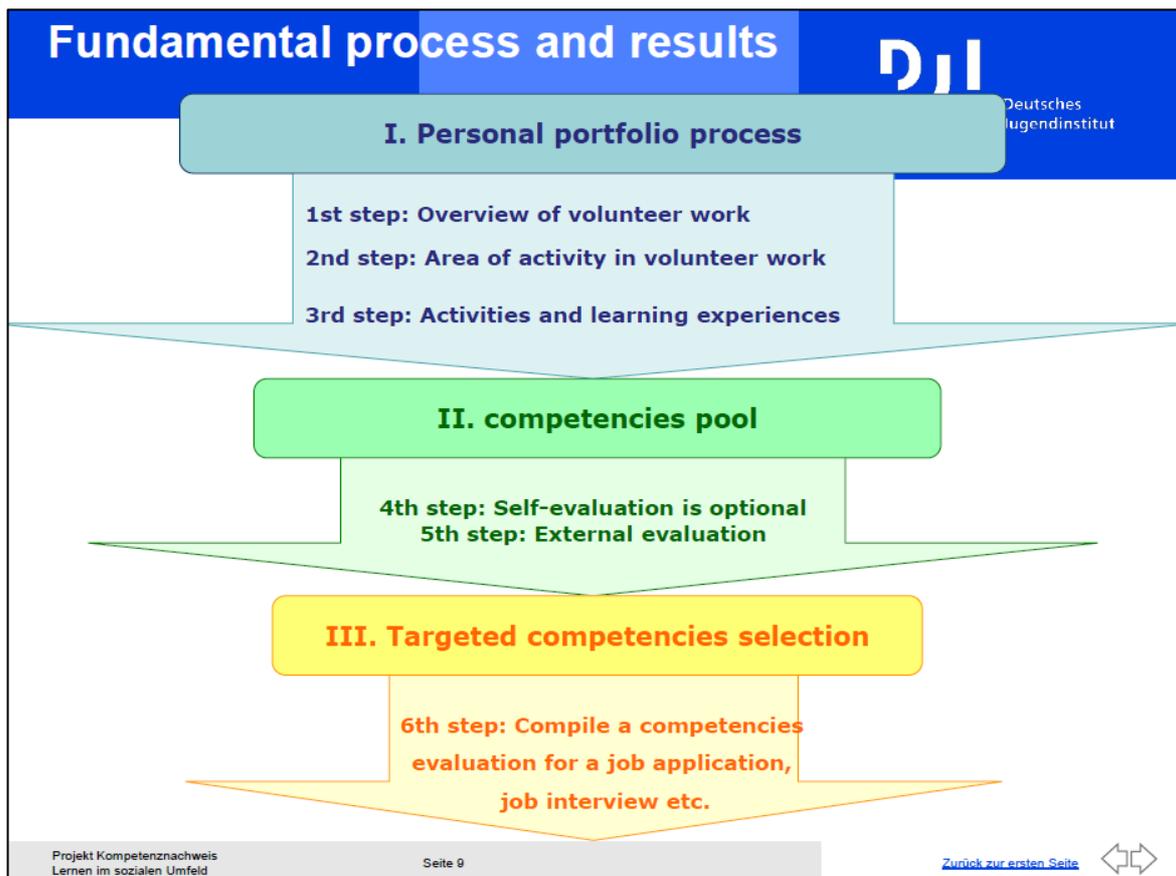
In the next step, a list of competencies compiled based on qualitative surveys of personnel managers offers guidelines for identifying applicable competencies. If necessary, additional competencies can be added to this list.

The competencies pool consists of a self-assessment and an external assessment. When participants conduct self-assessments, the competencies derived during the previous step are transferred to a worksheet. Then the volunteer assesses the degree of independence with which each activity was carried out and evaluates the transferability of these competencies to other areas.

Finally, an external assessment is conducted by one or a number of appropriate individuals, for example, friends, superiors and coworkers. These people assess the list of competencies parallel to each self-assessment. Missing competencies are added to the list; less pronounced competencies also become more clearly defined.

Following the process of external assessments, there is a dialogue to discuss discrepancies between the assessments.

Focusing on a targeted selection of competencies, the last step involves an assessment process in which individual competencies are assessed for job applications or performance reviews. At this stage, the person conducting the self-assessment process compares the acquired competencies once again with the results of the external assessment. Discrepancies need to be clarified and the reviewer's own self-assessment has to be reconsidered. In the end, the final results are added to the list and assessed once again with regard to the degree of independence and transferability. At this point in time, the individual has completed his or her personal Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work.



Results and documentation

Two forms can be filled out to document this personal assessment of competencies. The "Documentation of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work" is a certificate that volunteers fill out on their own. This describes the volunteer activities and the skills that were used or acquired during the process.

The "Confirmation of Volunteer Work" is issued and signed by the organization where the volunteer work has taken place. It contains a brief portrayal of the organization and a description of the volunteer's area of activity. Individual competencies are not listed here.

Summary: special characteristics of the process

The Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work has been explicitly developed for the area of volunteer work and is characterized by its orientation towards a broad target group involved in various fields of work.

The process takes into account the fact that the field of volunteer work has limited financial resources. All required materials and information can be downloaded free of charge from the homepage of the *DJI*. Thanks to this readily available information,

conducting the assessment of competencies is a self-explanatory process. There is no need for coaching structures or time-consuming training for the assessing process.

In order to transform learning experiences into competencies that can be used time and again, volunteers have to be aware of them and label them. In order to achieve this, the Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work offers an intensive self-reflection process that is guided by a step-by-step procedure and accompanying explanations.

A high degree of participant motivation constitutes the main requirement for the effective application of this process. In cases where a less motivated or a more educationally disadvantaged group has been targeted, a correspondingly wider range of coaching, counseling and support measures will be required.

Discussion

In response to a question concerning the time requirements associated with this process, the speaker said that the pilot phase of the project has shown that the six steps of the process require 1.5 to 2 hours to complete. The speaker underscored the importance of completing the process in one session so participants won't have to reacquaint themselves with the assessment method. Conference participants also noted that women with wide-ranging careers in the area of volunteer work often require a correspondingly large amount of time before they can recognize the full extent of their involvement. This necessitates a greater amount of time for processing.

A participant involved in youth association work asked about the importance of the competencies certificate, above and beyond the benefits of self-reflection, when submitting job applications. The speaker stressed that the self-reflection process is an essential step in fostering the ability to speak about one's own competencies. She also pointed to the importance of the written certificate, which could be included with a job application. This can be particularly useful for youthful applicants with relatively little work experience because it allows them to stand out from the crowd.

One participant had used the method with a group of students during a seminar at the Humboldt University in Berlin, and he reported that this tool could be extremely productive for people who are motivated to fill out the forms. However, it can be rather difficult for educationally disadvantaged people. This means that the process needs to be made more accessible.

Furthermore, a participant asked why the focus was solely on acquiring competencies in the area of volunteer work and not, for instance, on the area of families. This was explained by the speaker who was explicitly tasked with the

project. In response to a question concerning whether the process also took into account other methods aside from a purely cognitive approach, the speaker noted that the workbook offers a variety of suggestions here, such as visual and creative methods.

4 Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services (program “*Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent*”)

Overview of the process

- Designed for (disadvantaged) youth in volunteer work
- Pedagogically supervised process
- Examines non-school learning venues (previous experience) and focuses particularly on experience gained during volunteer work
- Focuses on informally acquired competencies
- Process: raises awareness of the importance of competencies and informal learning experiences in one's own life – uses questionnaires to assess competencies – conducts an assessment in dialogue with the volunteer – derives goals for competencies – repeated a number of times during the course of the voluntary year
- Self-assessment and external assessment
- A competencies certificate with a description of the activities and a number of selected key competencies is collectively issued by the organization in charge of voluntary service and the placement site – the young people are included in the competencies selection process
- Materials: Questionnaire for self- and external assessment; [practical tips](#) (completion early 2010)

Speakers: Susanne Rindt and Tina Stampfl, *Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik – ISS*, contact: susanne.rindt@iss-ffm.de, tina.stampfl@iss-ffm.de

Susanne Rindt and Tina Stampfl from the *Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik* presented the Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services, which emerged from the nationwide program called “*Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent*” (“Voluntary Services Build Competencies”).

This program is funded by the German Family Ministry and the European Social Fund, and pursues the goal of allowing young people without a degree, or with a very low level of education, to embark on a voluntary social or ecological year. This aims to pave the way for their involvement in informal learning situations and voluntary services. In practical situations they can acquire competencies and strengths that help them improve both their prospects for training and career opportunities. Voluntary services offer appealing and important informal learning opportunities,

which are particularly important for young people who have only achieved limited success in formal learning situations such as school classrooms. Between 2007 and 2010, funding was provided for eight projects at 12 different locations across Germany.

The method used in this program to assess competencies evolved from the previously presented Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work, which was developed by the *DJI*. At the outset of the program, the individual projects could freely choose which method they wanted to use. Since the program is located at the interface between volunteer work and youth vocational counseling, methods from both areas were taken into consideration. It soon became clear, however, that no appropriate process existed that was tailored to the specific conditions of youth voluntary services and the needs of the target group. An existing process to assess competencies thus had to be further developed and adapted.

Germany's voluntary social year (FSJ) and voluntary ecological year (FÖJ) programs have a firmly established structure. Service generally lasts for a year, in which time the young people pursue primarily practical activities at their placement site. In addition, the organizations in charge of youth voluntary services provide accompanying seminars that last for a total of at least 25 days. This constitutes the core of the program's pedagogical supervision. Any method of documenting competencies must take this timeframe into account.

What's more, careful consideration must be given to the roles and tasks that educators and instructors at the work venues assume when conducting competencies assessments. Moreover, it was important to identify the relevant competencies that can be used and acquired during volunteer work. To meet the needs of this target group, it was necessary to develop user-friendly questionnaires for self- and external assessment. An additional goal was to develop an appropriate competencies certificate for the young people that could be used as documentation and proof of the results achieved.

Goals and areas of application

The initial goal of the Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services was to make volunteers more aware of their abilities. The idea was to help them (more) realistically assess their competencies and articulate their abilities, for example, when applying for jobs later on. Furthermore, it is hoped that the young people will further develop their existing competencies during the course of their voluntary year and, whenever possible, acquire new competencies.

Another key objective of the method is to use competencies certificates to improve young people's opportunities when applying for training positions and jobs.

From the perspective of the organizations in charge of youth voluntary services, these competencies assessments can present an opportunity to more clearly illustrate to the outside world the potential of youth volunteer work as an informal learning venue. Moreover, it offers an excellent framework for supervising the target group and creates a common thread in the educational work.

The method can be applied to a variety of project contexts during the FSJ and the FÖJ voluntary year programs. The projects taking part in the program work with social, cultural, sports and environmental issues. In some cases, they require a phase of preparation before the actual volunteer work begins. The number of days dedicated to seminars varies. Some projects are also specifically tailored to the needs of young immigrants, and often cater to those who have linguistic difficulties.

Target groups

The method was specifically developed for disadvantaged youth who are performing voluntary services. It was also sporadically tested during the regular FSJ and has been assessed as fundamentally suitable for this area.

In its current form, it is more suitable for young people than adults because the questionnaire has been tailored to this target group, both in terms of the language and contents used. In order to use this within another volunteer context, it would be necessary to make time-related adjustments and to rethink who assumes the role of facilitator and who conducts external assessments.

Requirements and necessary resources

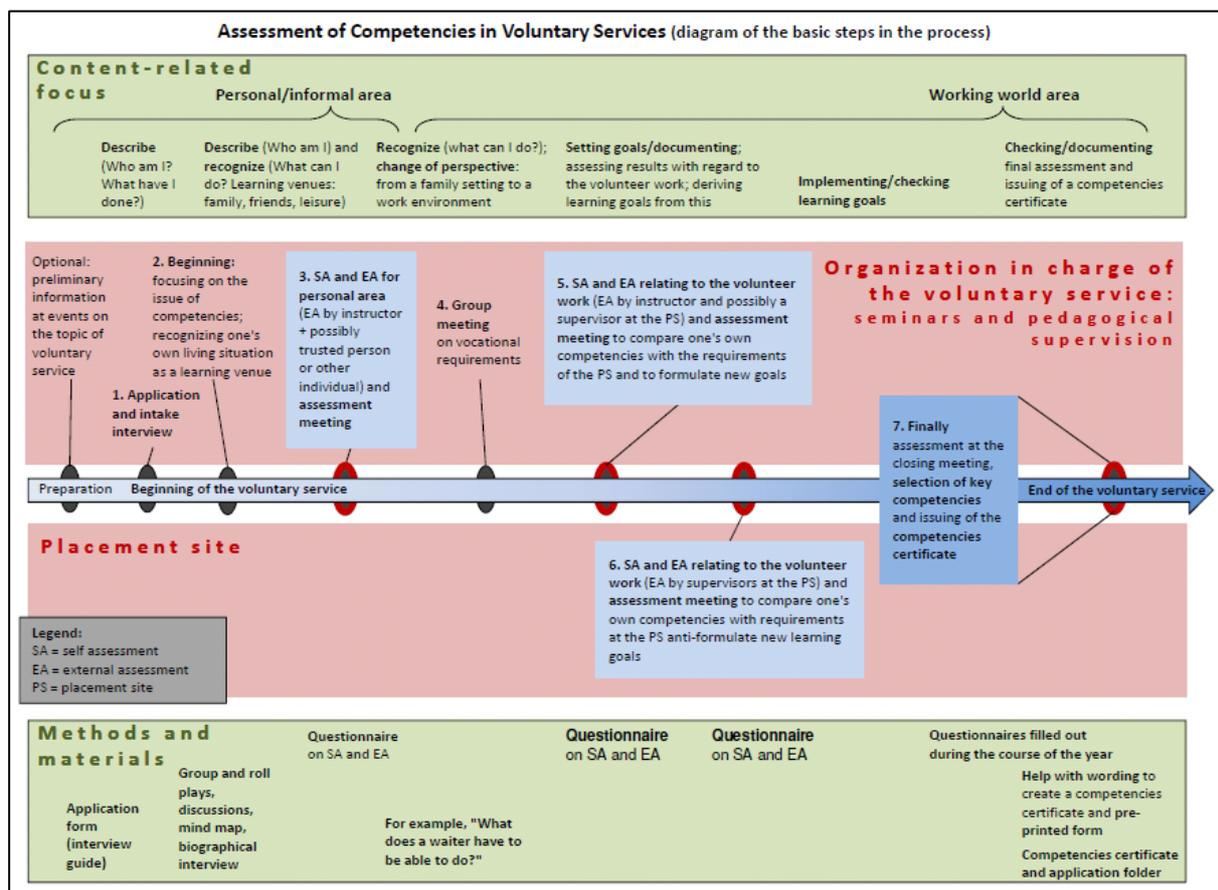
The Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services is in principle adapted to the general conditions of youth voluntary services. Nevertheless, the staffing ratio available for pedagogical supervision within the scope of the program differs from the ratio in the area of regular voluntary services (1:15 vs. 1:40!). External personnel are not required to conduct the assessment, however.

The main requirements are an interest and readiness on the part of the young people to reflect on their experiences and to come to terms with their personal strengths and weaknesses. Most of the young people in the program have had negative experiences with assessments made by other people (teachers, social workers, employment centers, etc.). They thus harbor a certain amount of skepticism concerning questionnaires and measuring tools, which are used time and again to show them all their inadequacies. They can only be motivated to come to terms with their own learning history and their competencies if they feel that they are involved and taken seriously – and if they recognize the importance of assessing their competencies and are not left to deal with the process on their own.

This has led to the identification of two major requirements for the successful application of this method:

- Participation in the process must be solely on a volunteer basis.
- Qualified pedagogical supervision is essential to the usefulness of the competencies assessment

This means that proper preparation and training of the pedagogically skilled personnel is decisive to the success and usefulness of the method. In the program, this training takes place primarily at the networking workshops of the educators. In order to ensure excellent guidance outside the program as well, the ISS project office is currently compiling a manual.



Steps and key elements of the method

The method basically consists of a number of chronological steps for self- and external assessment, each of which is assessed during a review session. At the same time, the focus changes throughout the course of the voluntary year. At first, it concentrates on personal issues. Later on, it is extended to issues that relate to the working world (see diagram).

At first, the young people describe the path that they have taken through life and their current situation: Who am I? What have I done so far? What have I learned in the process? The process also involves clarifying what competencies are and what competencies people can have. This introduction generally takes place during the first seminar. In addition to mind maps, various methods are used here, such as role-plays, experience-based educational games, and so on.

Afterwards, the young people conduct their first self-assessment. This relates primarily to their experiences in their personal surroundings and is done using a questionnaire. The educators conduct the first external assessment.

Great importance is attached to the review session that takes place after each self- and external assessment. The idea is to initiate a dialogue concerning the assessments that have been made and to support the young people's process of self-reflection. Educators may experience some initial difficulties assuming the role of external assessor since they have only known the young people for a brief period. It is therefore important that they convey that they have only seen them during a brief period in their lives (in the seminar, during individual supervision), and their assessment does not concern the entire individual.

The review sessions can also be used as an opportunity for the young people to set goals, for example, to decide what competencies they would like to improve or acquire during the voluntary year. This concludes the first step involving self-assessment, external assessment and reviews.

During the rest of the year, the focus switches from the personal sphere to the working world. This begins once again in the seminars, where participants reflect on their own volunteer work. It is also possible to highlight general vocational requirements or focus within the group on where commonalities and differences exist between competencies in personal and professional areas.

This is followed by yet another self-assessment relating to experiences at the placement site. The external assessment is thus conducted by an individual at the placement site. Afterwards, this individual will engage the volunteer in a review session.

Towards the end of the voluntary year the self- and external assessment will be repeated at the placement site. If at all possible, a collective review session should be conducted with the young person and the educators and instructors from the placement site.

During a collective final assessment, the self- and external assessments conducted throughout the course of the year should be examined once again. Participants in this discussion will also collectively reflect on which of the young person's strengths should be included in the competencies certificate.

The above outline is a model process. It can be varied and also applied in a reduced form (a series of self-assessments, external assessments and reviews both at the beginning and the end of the voluntary year). Ideally, documenting competencies will be tied in with the activities that have been planned as part of the pedagogical supervision.

The questionnaire for external and self-assessment is uniformly available for all young people. The listed competencies were selected in accordance with the program objectives (fostering self-reflection and communication competencies, promoting the ability to acquire an education, improving employability, enhancing the ability for integration and involvement). The questionnaire contains 14 individual competencies, which are more concretely described using various statements. The young people rate the degree to which these statements apply to them.

The questionnaire is designed to include language that young people understand and clear descriptions of the individual competencies. The questionnaire can be completed in stages, and some questions can be left blank if the respondent cannot or would rather not assess individual competencies. The questionnaires for the external and self-assessments are designed in an analogous manner.

Results and documentation

At the end of the year, the young people receive a competencies certificate. This comes in addition to the usual certificates and reports that are issued during the voluntary social year (FSJ) and voluntary ecological year (FÖJ), and the young person takes part in creating it. The certificate contains four elements:

- A description of the organization in charge of the voluntary service and the placement site
- An activity description that provides as many details as possible about what the young person did at the placement site

- A description along with an illustrative example of two to three key competencies that the volunteer has particularly demonstrated
- A list of further education measures and qualifications that the young person has completed within the context of the voluntary service

So far no information has been gathered on how potential trainers or employers perceive this certificate. Feedback received within the program indicated that a good task description is essential. An additional conference is planned to address this issue.

Summary: special characteristics of the process

The Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services is a transparent, pedagogically supervised process with clear and manageable methods. The process is tailored to the timeframe for completion of youth voluntary services and generally takes into consideration the lack of financial resources there. It can, in principle, be implemented within the context of pedagogical supervision; no external counseling personnel are required.

This method is distinguished by its fundamental focus on personal strengths. It highlights young people's individual experiences and describes all areas of their lives, including different learning venues and learning experiences (family, leisure, school, volunteer work).

The competencies assessment is based on the young people's participation. The young people actively participate in the process via their self-assessments and are involved in a dialogue when comparisons are made between self-assessments and the exterior assessments. In addition to documenting competencies, this enhances the young people's ability to engage in self-reflection and to communicate. The process very consciously builds on subjective assessments, which form the foundation for initiating a dialogue about personal competencies.

Discussion

Following the presentation, participants first asked whether an evaluation of the process has been conducted. The speakers explained that no explicit effectiveness analysis exists. Nonetheless, the participating organizations in charge of youth voluntary services were surveyed to find out how practicable the process was for them – and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

The speakers were also asked to what extent this should be understood as a portfolio, or rather as a method that is part of the process. The response clarified that both aspects were equally applicable.

Another question focused on the transferability of the process to other contexts in the field of volunteer work. Here the opinion was voiced that although the process is tailored to the specific conditions of youth voluntary services, it is also basically transferable. The key is that it must be accompanied by pedagogical supervision. It is also important to provide thorough training to the individuals who will be conducting the competencies assessments.

In response to a question concerning the future of the process after the end of the program, the speakers explained that it has already generated interest among organizations in charge of youth voluntary services and has been presented there in some instances. It is conceivable that this process could become further established in the area of youth voluntary services.

5 ProfilPASS

Overview of the process

- Applicable to all target groups and areas of education
- Two variations: ProfilPASS and ProfilPASS for young people
- Intensive coaching by trained and certified ProfilPASS counselors (individually or in groups) – users determine the extent of the counseling process
- Takes into consideration all possible learning venues (subdivided into eight large areas of activity)
- Takes into consideration all three types of learning (formal, non-formal, informal)
- ProfilPASS process: Step-by-step identification of competencies from the activities in various areas of life – assessment of the competencies – selection of the most important competencies – identifying goals
- ProfilPASS process for young people: pedagogical supervision is obligatory – processing various worksheets to reflect on experiences, activities, personal characteristics
- Main focus on self-assessment (although an external assessment is recommended, no concrete tools have been provided for this purpose)
- A competencies certificate is issued by the ProfilPASS counselor. This certificate lists selected key competencies (optionally with different levels); when it comes to the "ProfilPASS for young people," the certificate attests to participation in the process, but names no concrete competencies
- Materials: ProfilPASS folder with introduction and forms – available in bookstores

Speaker: Wolfram Hafner, *ProfilPASS-Dialogzentrum, Kolleg für Management und Gestaltung nachhaltiger Entwicklung gGmbH*, contact: whafner@kmgne.de

Wolfram Hafner, a ProfilPASS counselor, presented the ProfilPASS system. This process is the result of a feasibility study from the “*Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens*” project (“Continuing Education Certificate Attesting to Informal Learning”), which was collectively conducted by the *Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung – DIE* (German Institute for Adult Education), the *Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung – dipf* (German Institute for International Educational Research) and the *Institut für Entwicklungsplanung und Strukturforschung GmbH – ies* (Institute for Development Planning and Structural Research). The project ended in 2003 and was financed with funds from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the European Social Fund.

The study focuses on the following issues:

- Is a continuing education certificate for everyone a suitable and realizable objective?
- Is a continuing education certificate an appropriate tool for assessing educational histories and formulating future educational and life goals?
- Does it support personal initiative for reaching these goals?

An additional goal of the study was to review the social and occupational acceptance of a continuing education certificate and to document the legal and content-related frameworks.

This resulted in a recommendation to develop a tool that could be used to reflect on one's own skills and abilities. The idea is to facilitate people's efforts to reflect upon, assess and design their educational, learning and career-related histories. It was also recommended that this process include professional supervision and an approach that is applicable to all target groups and areas of education. Competition with currently existing methods should be avoided and efforts should be made to make it compatible with existing initiatives.

Goals and areas of application

The benefits of the ProfilPASS can be described in three targeted dimensions that are on the individual, business and social levels.

On an individual level, the process aims to enhance participants' self-awareness through self-reflection. Coming to terms with one's own history promotes independent learning and the ability to articulate, and it boosts the motivation for lifelong learning. The process is furthermore designed to improve people's ability to engage in dialogue and individually determine where they are in life. Based on this approach, individual reflection and assessment can contribute to an effective further development of one's personal and professional history.

On a business level, the ProfilPASS can support the human resources development of companies. It makes it possible to more effectively hire the right employees for the right jobs, and the process can also be used to write qualified work references.

On a social level, the ProfilPASS aims to help strengthen equal opportunities and the general degree of participation, make formally acquired competencies more transparent, and promote the culture of recognition for competencies acquired during non-formal and informal learning processes.

With regard to possible areas of application, the ProfilPASS offers a great deal of flexibility, opening up a wide range of conceivable use scenarios: The ProfilPASS can be used for individual counseling and in rather open contexts, or to meet the needs of specific initiatives.

Areas of application include schools, student counseling, qualification courses, continuing education offers in the voluntary services of all generations, and associations. This leads to a wide range of collaborations with partners such as colleges and universities, adult education centers, Germany's Federal Employment Agency, companies and social and business associations. The ProfilPASS for young people is used, for example, during vocational preparation and orientation initiatives, classroom instruction and project weeks at special, lower, intermediate and upper secondary schools.

Target groups

The ProfilPASS differs from the two previously presented processes in that it was not explicitly designed for the area of volunteer work. It basically takes a multiple target group approach and is generally geared towards people who are looking for new challenges in their lives. This means that it can be particularly suited to the needs of people in transitional phases, such as students, trainees, people returning from parental leave or unemployed individuals.

The ProfilPASS is available in two different versions. There is the general ProfilPASS that caters to adults and the ProfilPASS for young people, which has existed since 2007 and is tailored to the needs of young people ages 14 and up.

Requirements and necessary resources

Use of the ProfilPASS requires supervision by a certified ProfilPASS counselor. The counselor helps to formulate personal goals, identify informally acquired knowledge and create a competencies profile. The range of the counseling process is determined by the users and collectively agreed at the outset.

The counselors are trained in dialogue centers that have been certified by the ProfilPASS service office. In order to use the ProfilPASS in one's own organization or association, it is necessary to personally take part in training courses or involve a professional counselor.

The training courses to become a counselor for the ProfilPASS and the ProfilPASS for young people each take two days – or both can be completed simultaneously in three days. Tuition varies depending upon the provider and the scope of services

provided. The fees for a two-day course run between €130 and €300, and a three-day course can be expected to cost between €200 and €370.

Individuals who are trained counselors and work in a counseling capacity are eligible to become counselors. Candidates with a college degree require two years of professional experience in their main professions and three in their secondary occupations or in the area of volunteer work. Candidates without a college degree require more field experience, namely a full three years of professional experience in their main professions and three in their secondary occupations or in the area of volunteer work.

The ProfilPASS folders cost €37.90 for each single copy; volume discounts can be arranged. The cost of the ProfilPASS for young people is €19.90 for each individual copy.³

Steps and key elements of the method

The ProfilPASS method is a long-term and lifelong process. In this sense, working with the folders provides a means of generating momentum for the process of self-reflection which, depending on individual needs, is continued at specific intervals to produce a biographically-oriented process.

The coaching process linked with this method is seen as an aid designed to initiate the reflection process, find an appropriate means of verbal expression and practice the various steps of the process. Afterwards, individuals can start with independent and long-term continued work using the folders.

The main focus is on the process of self-assessment. Although external assessments are recommended, no concrete tools have been provided for this purpose. No list of competencies has been predefined for the self-assessment. Personal competencies are freely compiled during the process.

The ProfilPASS folder is divided into five sections (see diagram). The first section starts with "My Life – An Overview," which summarizes the various stages of a personal history. Using various methods, key biographical elements are collected and, for the time being, merely named.

³ Copies can be obtained from the Bertelsmann publishing house (http://www.wbv.de/promoframes/promoframe_600172026072005090507.html).




Section 1: My Life – An Overview

Section 2: My Areas of activity – A Documentation

- Hobbies and interests
- Household and family
- School
- Vocational training
- Military service, alternative service, voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ)
- Working life, internships, jobs
- Political and social involvement / voluntary work
- Exceptional events in my life

Section 3: My Competencies – An Evaluation

Section 4: My Goals and the Next Steps

Section 5: ProfilPASS *Plus*

Wolfram Hafner Fachgespräch Kompetenzbilanzierung Berlin, 21. September 2009

In the second section entitled "My Areas of Activity – A Documentation," the activities are described, focusing on areas such as hobbies, home and family, school, vocational training, military or alternative service, internships and jobs, political and social involvement and special living situations. Activities are then pinpointed ("the bottom line"), in other words, conceptualized as one or a number of abilities.

The abilities determined in this way are rated on a scale of one to four by the users themselves. The rating criteria are the degree of independence with which the competencies can be applied, and whether or not the person is capable of transferring these abilities to other contexts.

In the third section, "My Competencies – An Assessment," the abilities and competencies determined in the previous step are systematized. The objective here is to clarify to what extent they can be further developed, and to discuss them with regard to a personal profile. The results of this assessment exercise are documented in a written certificate that attests to the participation in a ProfilPASS process.

Based on this personal profile, in the next section entitled "My Goals and the Next Steps," participants plan their objectives and how these can be implemented. This step addresses the issue of how the participating individuals would like to apply and further develop the identified competencies.

The ProfilPASS folder ends with the fifth section, the ProfilPASS *Plus*. This provides information on the application process and gives various pointers on how to attest to the existence of acquired competencies. At this point, participants are also afforded an opportunity to file and organize their personal certificates and references.

The ProfilPASS for young people has existed since 2007. It is roughly organized along the same lines as the folder for adults, but is less text-heavy and includes other methods. It is tailored to the needs of the target group in terms of its methods, illustrations and language. The ProfilPASS for young people ages 14 and up is divided into four sections and requires pedagogical supervision. The first section entitled "My Life" offers methods and assistance for self-reflection on the young people's various life histories. Exercises here include filtering out and reflecting on important contacts and life areas.

In the second section entitled "My Strengths," competencies are determined and noted. The third section is devoted to determining objectives and additional prospects. In the fourth section, certificates, references and additional documents can be collected. The process focuses on strengths, in other words, its main objective is to identify personal strengths and competencies. This aims to introduce young people to a biographical approach along with processes of self-reflection.

Results and documentation

Participants in the ProfilPASS process receive a ProfilPASS competencies certificate as proof that they have completed the program. This includes the participants' key data and documents their participation in the process, including the integrated counseling. It also lists the competencies that were identified during the process. Different levels can optionally also be listed here.

The certificate is stamped by the counseling organization and signed by the counselor. When it comes to the competencies certificate for young people, the identified competencies are not mentioned, but participation in the process is confirmed. It also includes the explanation that "the young person has thus reflected on his/her own life, identified individual competencies, highlighted strengths and formulated personal interests."

The final section of the folder also includes a printed form that can be used to provide proof of various activities. This fulfills one of the goals of the process, namely to strongly encourage participants to collect verification of their competencies and participation in activities.

Summary: special characteristics of the process

The ProfilPASS has become a fairly well-known and widespread process for assessing competencies. Since its introduction in 2006, the ProfilPASS for adults has been requested approximately 37,000 times, and the ProfilPASS for young people approximately 33,000 times. Some 3,500 people have qualified to become ProfilPASS counselors.

The method is a long-term process of self-reflection which, depending on individual needs, can be further pursued at specific intervals to produce a biographically-oriented process.

It is applicable to all target groups and areas of education. All areas of life are integrated into the process. The ProfilPASS folder offers comprehensive and methodical materials and presents an effective tool for self-reflection. The area of exterior assessments, however, plays a secondary role.

The integrated counseling provides flexibility with regard to the extent and focus of the process. The ProfilPASS process can optionally offer participants comprehensive supervision, making it possible to combine the process of self-reflection and assessment with an intensive coaching process.

Using the ProfilPASS entails certain costs (qualification measures and/or use of a counselor, material costs of the folder). A certain amount of lead time is also required for qualification as a counselor or to coordinate the agenda and focus of the process with an external counselor.

Discussion

A number of questions focused on the resources required. Mr. Hafner explained that this is basically an offer where participants pay their own way. The program is often used by schools (financed by parents, government agencies, employment offices) or by foundations. Furthermore, Mr. Hafner underscored that this is an approach that is incorporated into the lives of individuals, and can also be continued at home. In view of all this, the costs are manageable.

When asked about the qualification and certification of counselors, Mr. Hafner said that this is intended to ensure the quality of the process, primarily with regard to the personal history perspective of the counseling and a fundamentally humanistic approach.

One of the participants remarked that the visual design (photos on the cover and additional pages) of the "ProfilPASS for young people" folder could be perceived as

rather awkward in certain cultural contexts. This could possibly lead to situations in which girls from Muslim families could not be open with their parents when working with the tool and/or the folder. Mr. Hafner made note of this and said that he would pass this information on to the consortium.

The speaker was asked to explain in greater depth the connection between this process and the area of volunteer work. Listeners had the impression that the process was primarily geared toward the complex area of "life competencies." It also appeared to have less to do with assessing competencies than with coaching, they said. Where did the speaker generally see points of connection to civil volunteer work here? Mr. Hafner clarified that this had to do with both assessing competencies and coaching – and said that it was often not possible to strictly separate the two. The area of volunteer work is an important area in the process, which in effect generally takes a more comprehensive – "life-encompassing" – approach. Based on a range of networking offers, there are plans to get the word out about the process, and thus achieve a greater degree of acceptance. Mr. Hafner emphasized that each organization in the area of volunteer management will basically have to decide for itself what the ProfilPASS system can do for its own target group and whether it is a viable option for their work. Flexible options are available here with regard to the concrete design of the steps in the process.

6 Qualipass

Overview of the process

- Target group: young people and young adults (up to age 25) and adults
- Two variations: "Qualipass for young people" and "Qualipass – educational certificate for adults"
- A recognition and coaching tool that aims to clarify professional abilities and vocational opportunities and support the establishment of career objectives
- Supervision by self-elected, volunteer coaches is possible (for example, teachers, persons from associations & youth groups who enjoy the participant's trust, friends of the family etc.)
- Process: obtaining certificates for activities in various settings (internships, work in associations, stays abroad etc.) – each certificate contains a description of the specific activity and perceived strengths – collecting these in a folder – reflecting on this practical experience and the competencies acquired during the process (independently or together with a coach)
- Collecting external assessments: a subjective description and perception of the activities and acquired competencies seen *from the perspective of the placement sites*
- Individual certificates can be copied and, based on their relevance, used as references for job applications
- Materials: folder and complementary materials are available from the service center; the folder is also distributed to young people via schools, associations and youth organizations

Speakers: Hanna Beier and Tanja Sauter, *Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg*, contact: beier@jugendnetz.de, sauter@jugendnetz.de

Hanna Beier and Tanja Sauter from the *Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg* (Baden-Württemberg Youth Foundation) presented the Qualipass, a tool that can be used to document personal and professional competencies. It was jointly developed between 1999 and 2000 by the Freudenberg Foundation and the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of Baden-Württemberg. The Qualipass initially targeted young people ages 12 and up.

The project was launched in response to the increasing social importance of informal learning. It focused primarily on competencies that young people acquire during volunteer work. The aim was for these competencies to be used for the transition to

training and professional life, as well as for the young people's personal development.

Following a test phase in three regions of the state of Baden-Württemberg, the Qualipass was introduced throughout Germany in 2002. Since then the *Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg* has been responsible for project management and product development. Today, there is also a nationwide version of the Qualipass. Since 2009, there has also been a Qualipass for adults called the "*Bildungspass Baden-Württemberg*" ("Baden-Württemberg Educational Certificate").

Goals and areas of application

The prime objective of the Qualipass is to promote a vocational orientation for young people that is initiated at an early age and actively shaped. It aims to serve as a guide for raising awareness of vocational abilities and opportunities. This process illustrates for young people the competencies that they already possess, the areas that are still lacking, and what possible steps they can now take. The Qualipass strives to facilitate the process of self-reflection and to encourage participants to pursue their volunteer work. The idea here is to help the young people take initiative and assume personal responsibility, and to enhance their sense of self-assurance.

The Qualipass was developed with the overall objective of boosting the standing of extracurricular learning, expanding the conventional expertise surrounding social, communicative and personal competencies, promoting lifelong learning, motivating people to get involved and generating initiative. An additional goal was to enhance the importance of volunteer work as a venue for informal learning and to contribute to its recognition.

The Qualipass is primarily known in Baden-Württemberg, where it is in high demand. Although it is applied on an individual basis, schools, youth organizations, associations and regional contact offices also support its use.

Target groups

The target group of the Qualipass includes young people and young adults ages 12 and up or in the process of identifying their occupational goals.

The Qualipass for adults, i.e., the "*Bildungspass Baden-Württemberg*", generally addresses the needs of adults who would like to document their volunteer work or qualification measures.

Requirements and necessary resources

Using the process requires a folder that can be purchased from the *Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg* for two euros.⁴

In order to use the Qualipass as a tool for self-reflection and orientation, the process can also be facilitated by a volunteer coach. This role should be assumed by an individual who enjoys a high degree of trust.

Steps and key elements of the process

The Qualipass process is based on external assessments by various placement sites and on a joint reflection effort with the coach of the young person or adult.

The actual Qualipass is a 12-page folder in DinA4 format where certificates for extraordinary activities are collected. At the outset, the folder contains the owner's key data as well as tips and information on vocational orientation and beginning a career. The process focuses primarily on the certificates.

The certificates are collected in a folder and can document activities such as involvement at school, in associations, in the community, in-company training and courses. There are a variety of printed forms available to cover different areas.

Schools, youth organizations and associations provide the young people with information on the Qualipass and its principles and goals. Contact offices in every administrative district of Baden-Württemberg have materials and additional information.

The Qualipass offers benefits that go beyond its portfolio function when the young person is supervised by a self-elected and volunteer Qualipass coach. Thanks to this coaching, the Qualipass becomes a process-oriented tool for reflection. The coach should be an adult who enjoys the trust of the young person (for example, a teacher, sports coach, friend of the parents). This individual accompanies the Qualipass over the long term and discusses the contents of the certificates with the young person.

⁴ Additional certificates that attest to individual activities are available for downloading along with complementary pages with further information on starting a career (<http://www.qualipass.info>).

Basic principles of the certificates

QUALIPASS



- ➔ Subject of external evaluation
- ➔ Focus on strengths and resources
- ➔ No predetermined minimum demands
- ➔ To be filled out by the person who knows the young person best

Jugendstiftung
www.qualipass.info

Results and documentation

The certificates are a subjective external assessment. They focus on strengths and resources. The printed forms contain information on the location, duration and timescale of the performed activity. Each area of responsibility and activity is also described. Furthermore, the perceived strengths of the young person are documented. Key qualifications and the young person's personal profile are noted. The document is signed by the issuing person, stamped by the organization and, if appropriate, signed by the chairperson of the organization.

There are no minimum requirements for the issuing of a certificate with regard to the duration of the activity or the underlying type of activity.

The visible result of the Qualipass process is a collection of certificates documenting informally acquired competencies. This produces a documentation of an individual's competencies profile. It highlights developments and learning progress. Individual certificates can be copied and, based on their relevance, used as references for job applications. The Qualipass has also proven to be an effective tool for vocational counseling.

Summary: special characteristics of the process

Although it is primarily known in Baden-Württemberg, the Qualipass is a widely used tool to certify competencies. An estimated total of some 300,000 users have benefited from it, and approximately 30,000 Qualipass certificates were issued in 2008 alone. Regional distribution of the Qualipass has enhanced the networking of educational and volunteer offers on location.

The certificate offers a high degree of openness and flexibility. It can be used to document diverse learning venues and learning contents, and thus promotes the recognition and appreciation of civil volunteer work.

The certificate is easy to use, both for participants and for individuals at the placement sites that document the acquired competencies. The process is cost-effective. The certificates offer brief and meaningful feedback.

The Qualipass is based on subjective external assessments. It is not a standardized measuring process. This means that it can be tailored to the needs of individual young people and their abilities. Although it may not be a comprehensive instrument for reflection, the Qualipass offers an opportunity and a basis for self-reflection.

Discussion

Questions concerning the Qualipass focused initially on the extent to which the process from Baden-Württemberg could be exported to other German states. In response, the two speakers pointed to the nationwide version, which can be ordered from the *Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg*. Participants welcomed the low cost of the process.

Another question focused on its use as a tool for reflection. Generally speaking, supervision with a suitable coach is essential here, as has been clearly shown by experiences from the pilot phase, according to the speakers.

One participant asked whether the process had been evaluated, and the response was that it had not. Nonetheless, the Qualipass has achieved considerable practical importance, as witnessed by its prominence and popularity (primarily in Baden-Württemberg).

7 Comparative discussion

The subsequent discussion facilitated by Thomas Kegel focused primarily on two issues:

- On the organizational level, what goals are associated with the introduction of a process to assess competencies?
- What criteria would the participants at the conference use to select a process?

7.1 Goals for the introduction of a competencies assessment process from the perspective of the organization

On the whole, there was an emphasis during the discussion on heightening the general level of awareness of informal learning in volunteer work. Competencies assessments and certificates have a potential for documenting the value of this learning and thus contributing to the recognition of the area of volunteer work as a venue for informal learning. This can create advantages in a number of ways: on a societal level, for the organizations in the area of civil volunteer work, and for the individual recognition of the volunteers.

Enhancing the recognition and motivation for volunteer work

Documenting competencies that volunteers have used and acquired contributes to the attractiveness of the volunteer work and can enhance motivation.

During the discussion, however, participants shed light on the inconclusive and complex nature of this line of reasoning. Experts in the area of youth associations warned against perceiving the opportunity of acquiring key competencies as the main reason for taking up volunteer work, and thus organizing volunteer activities as a training session for the working world. Gaining qualifications for the labor market must not constitute the main incentive for engaging in volunteer work. Participants felt that incentives must arise from other considerations, above and beyond the pure logic of the labor market. Otherwise there is a danger that volunteer work may be exploited and robbed of its intrinsic value and specific structures. It was also stressed that education is about more than the mere acquisition of competencies. Education has an intrinsic value that goes beyond strictly utilitarian considerations. This prompted some participants to urge their colleagues not to restrict the debate on learning opportunities in volunteer work to a purely target-oriented view of education.

Experts in the area of women's associations offered a slightly different perspective. They pointed to the opportunities that could be gained by raising the value of informal learning in volunteer work, particularly for individuals who have not pursued gainful employment for a long time, and how this could generally promote the image of volunteer work. Generating increased awareness for volunteer work's ability to enhance people's competencies and education can contribute to more equal social recognition of volunteer work and gainful employment. In connection with this issue, the facilitator pointed to initiatives that are pushing for volunteer work to be counted towards retirement pensions.

Organizational development and image

On the level of organizations, participants emphasized the potential of competencies assessments for organizations that endeavor to externally convey their educational work and educational impact. During the discussion, it was stressed that organizations can use this to enhance their image and stand out from other organizations and offers. This can be particularly important for associations and organizations that are highly dependent upon acquiring additional sources of funding.

Assessments of competencies offer an additional opportunity for the volunteer management of organizations because they make it possible to effectively and systematically evaluate informal and non-formal learning offers to discover which competencies can be applied, acquired and further developed in each situation. This approach can also create a better fit between the motives and competencies of a volunteer and the demands of the available placement opportunities.

Enhancing the volunteers' personal development

An important issue in the discussion was the goal of using competencies assessments to support the volunteers' personal development based on a process of self- and external reflection. This objective was stressed primarily in the area of voluntary services. Competencies assessment processes tie in here with the educational mission of the organizations and associations. Experience has shown that young people in particular are often unsure about how to assess their abilities and how to express this. At this point, participants voiced the urgent need to clarify young people's competencies by focusing on their personal strengths and taking a biographical approach. This also holds true for people in transitional phases. They also stressed the necessity of helping volunteers to learn how to verbally express their abilities and competencies.

Documenting acquired competencies

There are differing views concerning the extent to which documenting acquired competencies is an important goal. The basic emphasis was on using a reflection process to empower volunteers, which was placed above the concrete labor-market-related expectations normally associated with a written competencies certificate. Comments from experts in the areas of youth work and vocational qualifications made it clear nonetheless that certification is an important element of the culture of recognition for participants and can be very useful when applying for jobs. It was noted however that there is a clear need to gather more information in this area, especially with regard to how competencies certificates are perceived by companies.

7.2 Criteria for selecting a process

Manageable use of resources

During the discussion it became clear that the use of resources is a key criterion for selecting a process. This includes the financial costs and the ability to integrate the process into existing structures. Here is where criteria such as user-friendliness and manageability come in to play. On this note, it was mentioned that there is also a need for a straightforward process that can provide the responsible individuals with qualifications.

Experience with the Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services has shown that – in the field of youth voluntary services – it is helpful not to see the introduction of a competencies assessment method as a big new system. When introducing a process, it can be helpful to integrate the process steps into activities that are already taking place and flexibly adapt them to the appropriate contexts. It is essential here not to introduce an assessment as a top-down process, but rather to seek out existing areas of commonalities. In youth voluntary services, these are the structures of the pedagogical supervision.

Communicability

The discussion underscored the fact that the criterion of a process's communicability plays a role in two respects: first in terms of internal communication, and second with regard to communication to the outside world.

Knowledge is always linked to individuals. There is always a danger that knowledge of how to apply a competencies assessment process can be lost during changes of personnel. Organizations in the area of civil volunteer work often have very few full-

time paid staff positions and knowledge has to be passed on by volunteers. In order for a process to be effectively applied over the long term under these conditions, there needs to be a way for the required information to be passed on in a well presented manner. During the discussion this prompted experts from a wide range of areas to call for an intuitive and user-friendly tool.

Communicability to third parties plays a particularly important role when it comes to issues of recognition and aspects of external communication. Various participants at the conference emphasized that the goals and basic approach connected with a process should be readily understandable and comprehensible. This is absolutely essential if use of the process is to lead to enhanced recognition for the volunteers and the organization.

Another issue raised during the discussion focused on the issue of attributability. Competencies demonstrated within the framework of certain activities have not necessarily and exclusively been developed in the volunteer setting. This fact should be taken into account in order to avoid falling into an "attributability trap." The volunteer is no "blank slate," but *where* the competencies have been acquired is less of a relevant issue than *which* competencies have been used and demonstrated during volunteer work. When writing certificates, priority should therefore be given to terms like "perceived" and "ascertained" competencies, and it is best to avoid words like "acquired" and "achieved."

Target group effectiveness

During the discussion, it was emphasized that each process must be tailored to the requirements and conditions of the targeted user group. This plays a particularly important role in volunteer contexts where organizations strive to reach educationally and socially disadvantaged target groups.

It became clear that the area of volunteer work is highly diverse and this means that one of the main requirements of assessment processes is that they should be adaptable to individual situations. The degree of flexibility exhibited by a process is an important criterion here. This means that a process can be perfectly tuned to the individual needs of specific target groups and beneficially implemented. In areas with heterogeneous target groups – such as intergenerational voluntary services – it is important that the process can be applied to a wide range of users.

It is of course also important to take into consideration the goals that the volunteers themselves associate with a competencies assessment. Participants who work in the area of women's association work emphasized that it was necessary to differentiate between volunteers whose main focus is on qualifications for the labor market and

those who are primarily interested in recognition. Depending on the existing situation at the outset, the process can then also be given a more low-key character.

Certification

Experts from a number of areas, including youth association work and continuing education, noted that connectivity to existing certifications can be a very welcome and beneficial feature. It is conceivable that a certain degree of connectivity could be established with regard to the new bachelors and masters degrees, where credit points have to be earned. The facilitator pointed out that volunteer work could acquire an established position within these rather academically oriented institutions, as is already the case in the UK. Additional developments in Germany need to be closely observed and the issue has to be pursued to determine the extent to which such a notion is currently being discussed at German universities.

The discussion also broached the question of whether competencies certificates are overvalued in terms of their importance for the labor market. There were various views as to whether the certifying process should strive for a greater degree of standardization, or whether the advantages of an individually tailored approach outweigh any drawbacks. At this point in the discussion, Wolfram Hafner pointed out that, from the perspective of German businesses, a diversification of certificates and paperwork should be avoided and harmonization and standardization are desired. Far too much confusion and complexity overshadows the value of the certificates, both for the document holders themselves and the companies. On the other hand, experts from diverse areas stressed the need for certificates with individual solutions that are adapted to each target group and area of use.

In conclusion, the majority of the participants expressed an interest in dealing more intensively with the topic of competencies assessments and learning about additional processes for assessing competencies in the area of volunteer work. Participants agreed that additional exploration of the issue will have to focus on exchanging ideas with companies. It was suggested that a dialogue be established with German industry to discuss aspects of recognition and certification.

8 List of participants

Institution	Name
Forschungsverbund DJI/TU Dortmund	Maik-Carsten Begemann
Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg	Hanna Beier
BBE Geschäftsstelle (Nationales Forum)	Ina Bömelburg
Germeringer Insel	Monique Braun
Unionhilfswerk Sozialeinrichtungen gGmbH	Daniel Büchel
Forschungsverbund DJI/TU Dortmund	Mirja Buschmann
Europarc Deutschland e.V.	Kerstin Emonds
Quifd - Agentur für Qualität in Freiwilligendiensten im fjs e.V.	Fabian Estermann
BAG ev. Jugendsozialarbeit	Kira Funke
Deutscher Bundesjugendring	Daniel Grein
Treffpunkt Hilfsbereitschaft	Matthias Hahn
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin	Dr. Stefan Hansen
Projektbüro "Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent", ISS e.V.	Alexandra Hoorn
Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland	Thomas Kegel
Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen	Heide Koschwitz
"Migrantenorganisation als Träger v. Freiwilligendiensten", ISS e.V.	Irene Krug
Katholische Frauengemeinschaft Deutschlands Bundesverband e.V.	Dr. Heide Mertens
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin	Andrea Nieszery
FFD-Familien- und Partnerorganisation	Susanne Reichhardt
Universität München	Dr. Andrea Reupold

Institution	Name
Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent, ISS e.V.	Susanne Rindt
Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg	Tanja Sauter
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Projektbüro "Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent", ISS e.V.	Anna Scheller
Johanniter Unfall Hilfe Geschäftsstelle	Jürgen Schill
Quifd - Agentur für Qualität in Freiwilligendiensten im fjs e.V.	Melanie Seufert
Diakonische Leipziger gGmbH	Susanne Siebert
Bertelsmann Stiftung	Sarah Maria Soldanski
Projektbüro "Freiwilligendienste machen kompetent", ISS e.V.	Tina Stampfl
Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland	Cordula van de Weghe
in Went gGmbH ASA Programm	Betty Wilke
INBAS-Sozialforschung	Benjamin Wösten
Fachberater ProfilPASS System	Wolfram Hafner
Ministerium für Generationen, Familie, Frauen und Integration des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen	Petra Zwickert

9 List of appendixes

- Agenda
- PowerPoint on Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work
- PowerPoint on Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services
- PowerPoint on the ProfilPASS
- PowerPoint on the Qaulipass

Agenda

Conference "Tools for Assessing the Competencies of Volunteers – What Works for Whom and in Which Context?"

Date: September 21, 2009, 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Room 008 of the German Association of
Public and Private Welfare (*Deutscher Verein*) in Berlin

Facilitation: Thomas Kegel, *Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland*

- 10:30 **Reception**
- 11:00 **Welcome and introduction** (Andreas Pautzke | Deputy Chairwoman of the *BBE*, Susanne Rindt | *Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik*)
- 11:30 **The Assessment of Competencies Gained during Volunteer Work**
(Dr. Andrea Reupold | *University of Munich*)
- 11:55 **The Assessment of Competencies in Voluntary Services**
(Susanne Rindt/Tina Stampfl | *Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik*)
- 12:20 **The ProfilPASS system**
(Wolfram Hafner | *ProfilPASS* counselor)
- 12:45 **The Qualipass**
(Hanna Beier/Tanja Sauter | *Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg*)
- 1:15 *Lunch break*
- 2:00 **Comparative discussion – competencies assessment for diverse target
groups within the context of civil volunteer work**
- 3:20 **Summary and conclusion**