

A Qualification Framework for Trainers in Europe – a Realistic Approach?

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Several trends suggest that the training practice in companies and institutional contexts is changing, resulting in new competence requirements for trainers both in terms of their basic qualification that lead to becoming a training practitioner in the first place as well as in terms of trainers' continuing professional development. Overall, the education and training environment in which VET practitioners work is characterised by several major trends:

- Demographic shifts:
The demographic change in European societies induces that the number of young people is decreasing. This affects the training market in so far as training providers increasingly compete for students, trainees and adult learners, who become more demanding in terms of expecting tailor made training offers. A trend can be observed that clients expect training to be shorter, faster and more targeted. At the other end the demographic shift entails the risk of a shortage of skilled training professionals in the near future.
- Integration of VET into more comprehensive lifelong learning systems:
The provision of vocational education and training is increasingly becoming integrated into more comprehensive learning and education systems. This raises issues concerning the modularisation of programmes and the transferability between VET and other educational pathways. It can also be expected that this development will gradually undermine the distinction between the professional roles of VET teachers and trainers in terms of their work tasks, responsibilities and competence requirements.
- Decentralisation of education and training systems:
In many European countries a tendency towards decentralising national education and training systems can be observed, leading to a greater degree of autonomy for training providers. This, on the one hand, increases the opportunities for training practitioners to influence training practice. On the other hand it also induces new demands on the planning, implementation and coordination of training provisions which may result in more pressure for training practitioners. The increase in local or institutional autonomy also means that various stakeholders such as enterprises and professional organisations are becoming directly involved in the activities of VET institutions. This increases the networking and coordination requirements for institutions, organisations and companies and their training staff.
- Enhanced standardisation and professionalism of VET teachers across Europe:
Supported by the Bologna process, European member states increasingly establish frameworks of national standards for VET teachers, for example for curriculum development, tutorial support, skills assessment, management of learning environments and teachers' continuing professional development.¹ Those standards tend to be linked to competence frameworks, which, however, are mandatory or legally anchored to different degrees depending on the respective national context. Also the formal qualification requirements for VET teachers are fairly standardised across Europe and

¹ Common European principles for teachers' competences and qualifications were adopted as key elements of the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education" (COM (2007)392).

are typically related to a certified teaching qualification. For permanent teacher positions a pedagogical qualification is increasingly becoming a legal requirement. One key objective of introducing higher levels of standardisation for VET teachers is to enhance their professional status, which tends to be lower compared to the status of teachers of academic subjects or general schooling. The status issue results in problems of recruitment and retention of VET teachers in many countries. In addition, ongoing strategies to improve the quality of vocational teaching and learning through national standards are a key driver to the emerging professionalism among VET teachers.

Contrasting the situation of VET teachers, we find notable differences in the degree of regulation of training contexts and standards of qualification and professional development among trainers. Great differences exist between the European countries. For example, regulation is relatively high in Germany or Austria and relatively low in Denmark, Bulgaria or the Netherlands. But also between work contexts, sectors or areas of training there is great variation in the level of standardisation and regulation. While across Europe training provision and competence requirements for trainers working in health care are fairly strongly regulated, they are mostly unregulated in the ICT sector. They are more standardised for trainers working in public institutions than for those employed by private companies. Among companies, large companies usually have a clearly defined and advanced system of training, using specialised training departments and employing professional trainers at least to some degree. In small and medium size companies (SMEs), by contrast, training provision is often provided by part-time trainers who assume training functions in addition to their regular work tasks as skilled workers. Those in-company trainers generally have a craftsman qualification and some further technical or commercial qualification as well as some years of work experience. Their training activities take place alongside their general workload. A key issue here is that those skilled workers may not immediately identify themselves as trainers, which makes it difficult to reach them for inclusion into programmes specifically targeted at trainers. As concerns the different areas of training, initial vocational education and training (IVET) is more regulated and standardised than continuing vocational training (CVET) or adult education. In countries where the IVET tradition is strong such as in Germany or Austria standards for trainers also apply in terms of providing evidence of their capacity to work with young people, and pedagogical competences are a requirement to train apprentices.

Reflecting about trainers' skilling needs and competence requirements, recent European studies reveal that there is a great need for well developed pedagogical and social skills of trainers, particularly as mentoring, coaching and facilitating the learning process become increasingly relevant. The competences that trainers need encompass various facets:

- First, trainers need well developed *vocational competences* that enable them to train work-practice related, basic vocational and technical skills.
- Second, *pedagogical* and *social competences* are needed to facilitate didactic processes and the work with young people and adults, in particular fostering the integration function of training, mentoring, corporate learning and effectively passing on knowledge to others. Didactical skills are required with regards to the combination of work and learning, the identification of learning opportunities in the work context and

the ability to motivate and guide the learner towards autonomy and independent learning. The latter becomes particularly important against the shift from teaching and passing on knowledge to self-directed learning, which requires the active participation of the learner and adequate support from the trainer to motivate and facilitate learners' self-learning capacities. Greater emphasis is also being placed on the provision of situated learning, encouraging learning by doing, and on guiding and facilitating the process of reflection. Social competences include interpersonal, communication and team working skills and the ability to convey social values and manage training relationships, among others.

- Third *management competences* support training-related processes such as quality monitoring, project management and the cooperation with other institutions, stakeholders, colleagues and vocational schools, among others. Management competences are gaining significance against the above mentioned trends: the decentralisation of education and training processes; the integration of VET into broader lifelong learning arrangements; and the decreasing numbers of trainees which require particularly from SMEs to combine their training efforts and offers.
- Finally, *personal development competences* refer to the willingness to foster personal and professional growth and the ability to set targets for ones own professional development. Research has shown that intrinsic motivation such as becoming a better trainer or personal development objectives are the most important drivers for trainers' engagement in continuing learning, which mainly relies on personal interest and self-initiative. This is particularly the case for professional trainers.

In almost all European countries well developed vocational competences in combination with some years of practical work experience are a prerequisite to becoming a trainer in the first place. Whereas those vocational or subject-specific competences are observed to be well developed among trainers throughout Europe both in terms of quantity and quality, trainers tend to lack fundamental pedagogical, social and also management competences. For enhancing trainers' pedagogical and social competences most European countries have started to emphasise the pedagogical component in trainers' basic and further qualification. From the side of employers and training providers, however, it is the *combination* of the different competence facets that is most vaunted.

Management competences, by contrast, do not yet form part of trainers' training agenda in most countries, reflecting that trainers are not expected to have developed coordinating, organisational and management skills despite the fact that these can be regarded as essential for the effective organisation and delivery of training. On the other hand it remains unclear whether all types of trainers actually need to dispose of management skills and if so to what extent. There is some good evidence that training practice in most contexts has changed relatively little; that despite the rhetoric about lifelong learning and innovations in training and teaching the dominant job profile and tasks of trainers are still very much centred around the assessment of learning outcomes and the core delivery of training; that the training methods trainers apply remain fairly standard and little innovative; and that tasks related to quality monitoring, recruitment or the cooperation with other institutions play a relatively minor role or no role at all in trainers' everyday work practice. Ultimately it seems that the performance of networking and organisational tasks related to training are only relevant for a small minority of trainers.

Whilst there seems to be broad alignment as concerns the competence requirements for trainers, the heterogeneous picture of trainers' roles, tasks and work contexts makes it difficult to envision the development of a competence or qualification framework for trainers across Europe in the near future. It may also be questionable whether such a framework could be useful or applicable to the broad variety of training contexts and practice if it exists. In terms of skills and formal qualification, research has shown that in most countries and contexts trainers are not expected to have a particular trainer qualification. Employers rather tend to value trainers' vocational background and practical expertise as a prerequisite for becoming a trainer, while only a minority of trainers are also expected to have received some pedagogical training to be able to train others. Only trainers working for private training providers seem to be an exception in this regard as they mostly have a formal trainer qualification.

On the other hand it is fairly obvious that personal interest more than any kind of formal or legal requirement drives trainers' motivation to becoming a trainer in the first place – and getting the required formal qualification if necessary – and their active participation in continuing learning to develop their competences subsequently. It could even be observed that where legal requirements oblige trainers to pursue continuing training to update their knowledge and skills their engagement in continuing professional development is less than for those groups for which continuing learning is voluntary. Ultimately, it is the lack of incentives and benefits or adequate training opportunities that prevent trainers from engaging in continuing learning rather than lack of legal enforcement. Intrinsic motivation such as becoming a better trainer or personal development objectives, by contrast, are the most important drivers. In a recent survey conducted with 738 VET practitioners across Europe, self-employed trainers, who are probably the least regulated category of all possible trainer types, had the highest rating on self-initiative and engagement in continuing learning and demonstrated the most positive attitude towards their profession.

If obtaining the necessary training competences ultimately is the personal responsibility of the trainer and may not even be formally required in most contexts the question arises what use can a competence or qualification framework for trainers have? At the European level it is assumed that it would help to enhance the professional development of VET professionals, a priority area that received special emphasis during the follow-up of the Lisbon strategy. However, more than enhancing trainers' professional development a qualification or competence framework is regarded instrumental for raising the status and recognition of the training profession. In addition, countries seek to enhance the quality of their education and training system by introducing standards for the work and qualification of trainers – or the other way around. In fact, the quality of the respective national VET system, the low status of trainers and the lack of recognition of trainers' competences are major issues of concern in countries, where the training sector and training provision remain largely unregulated. Here a national competence or qualification framework that specifically addresses the training profession is regarded to be a stepping stone to improve the quality of training in the medium and longer term. It is also seen as an important tool to make the training profession more attractive, a prerequisite to strengthen the vocational route and to prevent recruitment problems of VET practitioners in the future. These are some reasons why Poland, Spain and Turkey, for example, have enhanced their efforts to develop a national qualification framework that can be applied to

trainers. At the European level it is assumed that such frameworks promote access to training between different pathways, facilitate mobility and acknowledge competences at least in an ex-post manner. Yet it is not clear how qualification frameworks can provide access for learning and how they can acknowledge prior informal and work-based learning and work experience.

As a more learning-oriented approach the European Leonardo da Vinci project *TTPlus* investigated the opportunities for developing a common framework for the continuing professional development of trainers in a cross-national perspective. The project modelled a possible framework along three scenarios:

- A *system-oriented scenario* according to which the professional development of trainers is mainly promoted by public policies. The key instruments here are newly developed certificates and qualifications as well as related training provisions or accreditation processes.
- The *market-oriented scenario* conceives of professional development of trainers as dependent of organisational choices, for example concerning provision of in-company training versus the outsourcing of training. For a market-based scenario the key instruments to be developed are organisational benchmarks for analysing the quality of internal training in comparison to the quality of external services, for example.
- The *community-oriented scenario* views professional development as primarily depending on trainers' own commitment. What is needed in order to strengthen this level of the framework are guidelines for community-based peer reviews and mutual certification (e.g. through trainers' professional associations).

The tasks and activities related to training have spread to extend to an increasing numbers of workers, especially skilled workers, who may not immediately identify themselves as trainers. Discussions with representatives of policy and institutions indicate that this is an issue of increasing concern in those existing programmes for the qualification and training of trainers, which are so far mainly targeted at full-time trainers. If the aim of a qualification or competence framework for trainers in Europe is to raise the profile and quality of training, then it must address all those concerned with training and learning regardless whether they are designated as a trainer or not. In addition, the project findings suggest that

- a) A framework should be based on the recognition of the importance of training for the development of individual competences and lifelong learning for individual employees and organisational development within enterprises and other organisations.
- b) A framework should recognise the different ways in which people learn and develop competences. This may include formal full or part-time training (externally or in the workplace) as well as informal learning, learning on the job and self-study. Trainers may have a role in supporting all these different forms of learning.