



# Common competencies required for all APEL professionals



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## **Common competencies required for all APEL professionals**

In general:

- keep the balance between guidance and assessment
- be aware of the tension between “confidential guidance” and decisions like assessment or even job assignment (through managers)
- should have an own budget for providing specific offers to their clients which meet individual needs (particularly see post assessment phase)
- being able to deal with conflicts (with clients and/ or with colleagues)
- general skills for counselling and guidance in order to assist the client to find out which of his competences could be accredited at all
  
- broad knowledge regarding occupational demands
- specific vocational skills which are useful to assist someone in the accreditation process of vocational skills

This may point to a two-step process: after having evaluated the fields of (occupational) interests the participant should be given the opportunity to explain his/her specific “competences” to be validated and possibly accredited. More detailed statements are to be extracted from the questions and answers below.

### **Have a thorough overview of the local, national and european context.**

- 1) Local: Local labour market, local CVT-institutions,
- 2) National: Some knowledge about national labour market, knowledge about the national laws/decrees regulation a) the labour market, b) CVT provision, c) the APEL procedures,
- 3) European: Knowledge about EQF and ECVET, EuroPass, European approaches towards APEL, including the critical views

### **Knowing how to co-evaluate the APPEL procedure with the candidates (→ quality assurance)**

We view the problem of the co-evaluation with the candidates in a broader horizon of evaluation of teaching and learning and assessment.

More appropriate is the expression “Quality development” instead of “quality assurance”. This is more appropriate because the whole concept of quality assurance stems from industrial production of tangible commodities where it is indeed possible to distinguish between products of high and low quality: “Quality test passed: “YES or NO”. This concept has been further developed to the quality management systems which include the production /work processes and the organisational structure of the whole enterprise. Most important example: ISO 9000ff. About 15 years ago it was realised that this concept is not applicable to institutions dealing with human beings. The result was the development of the EFQM (“European framework for quality management”) which aims explicitly at institutions dealing with people, particularly also non-profit institutions. A closer scrutiny of the criteria of EFQM (see respective chapter in the Scientific Report of the “Re-Integration“ Project) shows, however, that this instrument, originally also devised by large transnational companies, is not well suited for catching the specificities of human interactions, the ones between clients and practitioners as well as between the practitioners themselves. In the case of human interaction there can be no fixed “target of quality”. Rather all parties involved should get incentives to recognise their activities as an ongoing development process. The evaluation procedures of the APEL process should take this into account in the form of a continuing self-evaluation process of the practitioners, designed as a process of co-evaluating it together with the participants. More detailed information about different possibilities are just being developed in the new Leonardo-Project “Reflective Evaluation”. First results are to be expected in autumn.

In addition, a combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation is possible. The latter should be based on the continuing self-evaluation process but could be supported through external evaluators discussing those results with the practitioners every 3-4 years. A well designed and tested example for that – but related to evaluation of work processes in schools – can be found in: Landwehr & Steiner: Q2E (Quality through evaluation and development (“Entwicklung”)),

2002).

### **Ethical code for APEL staff**

In general it is important that the APEL staff regard the people who want to start the guidance process as clients not as customers. Regarding someone as a client means that the APEL staff focusses on the personal development of the client. In contrary regarding the respective person as a customer implies that there is a focus on his employability and ways in which he can be “made” useful in economic terms. APEL staff should at all times be aware of acting according to the demands of the Common European principles which means that they should deal with the client’s information in a confidential way.

Overall it is crucial that the APEL staff does not intrude too much into the private sphere of the client.

Information, personal as well as occupational, gathered within the guidance and counselling phases as well as in the accreditation procedure belong to the client and should not be used against his interests and without his agreement. If the client does not agree information cannot - under any circumstances - be given to e.g. employers or labour office staff. All results of the process belong to the client only and should not be used for other purposes.

At all times APEL staff should be aware of the difficulties the clients might face within the guidance and counselling process as well as within the accreditation process, e.g. feeling insecure with regard to their own picture of their competences; envisaging great need for success in the accreditation process because of personal life circumstances.

These aspects have further importance when dealing with people at risk. If the client gives the impression to be at risk, the APEL staff is asked to view the whole personality of the client and to advise him/her to request assistance and counselling from institutions which can meet his particular needs. Therefore APEL staff should have time for one-to one sessions.

In this context it is especially important that the client can choose a member of staff to whom he feels to have trust.

### **Models & theories of adult training & education**

We prefer to look at the situation from the point of view of learning. But if requested through the project’s tasks we will expand also on that.

## **Models & theories of adult learning**

In spite of the fact that it has been developed more than 35 years ago – that is at the peak of the process of progressively reforming the educational system – the theory of learning designed by Heinrich Roth (Pedagogical anthropology”, 1972) appears to be particularly appropriate especially also for the principle of adult learning.

In fact, because of the growing influence of neoliberal ideology also on the realm of education, many proposals for “reform” strengthen the view of a person as being a commodity. See also above “Ethical code”.

Roth distinguishes three areas of competence (see “notion of competency” below):

- Content related competence, which includes occupational competencies as well as those related to everyday life, like cooking a meal,
- Social competencies, which include social interaction between peers as well as the ones related to superiors and subordinates, aiming at a balance of supporting friendly human relations and being able to fight for one’s right in a conflict.
- “Self-competencies”, often called “personal competencies”. They include the development of values and attitudes which should fit to the former as far as possible; here not only “ideological aims” are important, rather a realistic self-image, including “negative” features, should be attained.

In addition ROTH distinguishes two processes – dialectical interrelated – for developing these competencies: acting and thinking.

The development of “action competence” – in all three fields mentioned above – is supported, but by no means solely directed by thinking. Therefore action competence has an importance of its own. The development of thinking should lead to higher levels of reflection, something which is strongly supported by experiences from acting. This development process should lead to everybody becoming a “reflective practitioner” through self-directed enlightenment (cf. Kant “What does enlightenment mean?”). Therefore conventional schooling can play only a limited part.

In recent times the collective features of this development have been stressed – see “Network society”. Therefore the APEL process should include the question in which networks the participants might be able to further develop their competencies.

Above that, in conventional education, training and counselling processes the importance of emotional factors (wishes, dreams and desires) has been heavily underestimated. An APEL process which does not take this into account may lead to completely misleading results. The former experience in formal learning and in occupational activities might well not fit at all into the “ true emotional interests” of a person. In order to recognise that, the counsellor has

- a) to know something about the relevant theories (see “Modèles du sujet”)
- b) be very sensitive in dealing with the client,
- c) respect the ethical code (see above) particularly with respect to the right for privacy.

**Models and theories concerning human beings (I do not know how to translate « modèles du sujet » !!! self, personality, ego ?????)**

Here we just mention some main theoretical “streams”:

- Rogers: Self-Concept;
- Kohlberg: Moral development;
- Piaget: Bodily activity as a main source of developing the thinking (Process d’équilibration)
- Freud: “Sublimation”,
- Many authors: Dialectic interaction of personalisation and socialisation

**Work on the notion of competency**

The original meaning was developed by the US-American linguists SEARLE and others in the 1960ies. They made the extremely important distinction (particularly for education and training) between competences and performance. The CEDEFOP definition “Ability to apply knowledge, know how and skills in an habitual or changing situation” sounds much more like what was originally designated by “performance”. It is obvious that only “performance” can be “measured“, although for more holistic tasks even that is very problematic and contentious among scientists.

Competence in the original sense, however, is the **inner potential** of people to tackle a task (“action competence”) or to develop a deeper understanding of the “world”. Both are extraordinarily important for planning one’s future life course – also in the occupational area -, and both to a great degree have been and can be acquired through experiential learning. Therefore they should be a central focus of APEL.

Here “measurements” of “inner potential” are completely impossible. Indeed, only the participants themselves are able to judge their “inner potential”. This was the central assumption, supported by the results, of the European project “Self-Evaluation”. As a consequence, guidance professionals should gain the ability to support people in self-evaluation. Possibilities can be found in the “Handbook for practitioners” of the above mentioned project. The results of this process of self-evaluation can be discussed with the guidance professional and

can be written down in a “Sheet of validation of experiences”, although of course only in a very restricted version, compared to the richness of the “inner potential” of a person.

### **Becoming a reflective practitioner, learn self evaluation**

- going through the accreditation process yourself
- reflecting own work (in a team) according to self-developed criteria for quality development (quality assurance is not enough)
- counselling colleagues as well as asking colleagues for counselling
- building circles for development of new ideas
- being aware of own prejudices and pre-assumptions towards the client

For the case of courses for “disadvantaged” people at risk (of exclusion) the European project “Re-Integration” has developed an interactive tool on CD-Rom (also online available) which supports reflection processes on six dimensions: Self-Evaluation and Reflection, Collaborative Networks of Actors, Inclusiveness, Funding and Administration, Situated Learning, Recognition and Assessment of Competences. This tool (available in English and in German) called QSED – “Quality through Self-Evaluation and Development “ can be, because of it’s high interactivity, easily adapted to other situations. This is carried through in the already mentioned European Project “Reflective Evaluation”, but it could be used, after due adaptation, also for ideas about becoming a Reflective Practitioner for APEL.

### **Orientation phase/ Etape d’orientation**

Detailed advice as how to carry through the APEL procedure should rely more on the research results of partners from countries where APEL is introduced on a larger scale. The German experience is only related to limited examples:

- a) “profiling courses”; b) model experiences which however aim at validation for participants, not at formal accreditation (see our paper ...)

### **Guidance and counselling phase**

We would like to refer here to the “Handbook for practitioners” from the “Self-Evaluation”-Project. It contains tools from seven European partners, but only for validation of non-formal and informal learning through self-evaluation processes of the participants themselves. It is accompanied by a CD-Rom where tools which are shortly described in the handbook can be downloaded, often in the original partners’ languages. Because of the broad cultural diversity it is difficult to extract common methods. But all methods are based on a common set of

cornerstones of the project which is also included in the handbook. The scientific report includes a SWOT analysis for each tool which refers to: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The value of these outcomes for our EuroguideVAL project consists in the fact that the cultural diversity relates also to a diversity of respective target groups. Therefore the whole bunch of tools could be used, after adapting them to the cultural setting in question, for dealing with different target groups.

### **Interaction in a setting of guidance and counselling**

What has been said before for the Orientation phase holds also here.

### **Clarification of what it means to accompany someone and working on one's attitudes in different situations**

In this context it is important to focus on the question if the APEL staff who is in charge of the guidance and counselling process should also be participate in the accreditation procedure. Pro's and Con's of this question need to be discussed with regard to the needs of the client as well as with regard to the role perception of the practitioners.

For the client it might be an advantage if he is accompanied through the different phases by one person to whom he can build a confidential relationship. Nevertheless it can also be a disadvantage if the whole process is accompanied by one person because the fact that the guide is also involved in the assessment might hinder the client to be open and to discuss his own realistic perspective on his competences (and his weaknesses) because he fears that this would influence his accreditation process in a negative way.

For the APEL practitioners it might be a very (maybe too) demanding task to accompany the whole procedure from the orientation phase to the assessment because in some cases their observations of the client during the guidance process might lead them to a conflict when accrediting the client's competencies.

### **Ways of listening/ways of relating to others**

Active listening skills

### **Assessment phase**

Could be expanded if necessary

In fact there are nearly no serious examples for APEL in Germany (only example "riding teacher case"). Therefore we focus on structured, supported and guided self-evaluation processes as mentioned within the statements for the guidance and counselling phase. Nevertheless there are growing efforts and initiatives for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. In CVT there is a growing number of different portfolios which assist clients in their documentary process. (See "National Report I")



From our perspective contentious discussion about the appropriateness of non-formal and informal learning as compared through the validation of competencies through SE should be kept in mind “See notion of competences” Otherwise important parts of the overall capabilities of the person might be overlooked

### **Post assessment phase**

In countries where there is no formal assessment for accreditation of APEL, like Germany, the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is embedded/should be embedded in a structure of more long term guidance where support should be given to the clients on the basis of the validation as how to carry on in their life that is seeking an appropriate job or looking for meaningful activities during times of unemployment.

In the case of Germany the seeking for an appropriate job should now days be assisted through a case manager who is responsible for the social benefit of client as well as for his further development and his way back into the labour market. In reality the situation is different at the moment, because of the lack of an appropriate number of jobs as well as because of the fact that the single case manager is responsible for up to 150 clients he mainly deal with the social benefits of his clients.

Against the background that there are not enough jobs we suggest to broaden the horizon of aims for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal competencies. We propose not only to use the findings for seeking for new jobs but as an alternative also for creative planning of meaningful activities outside gainful employment.