



**Comparative evaluation
- special remarks on
Occupational Standards and the
Training Standards for APEL
professionals**



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Introduction

This paper presents a brief comparative evaluation of the Occupational Standards as well as the Training Standards for APEL professionals. After that special remarks on the two papers will be made.

It has to be stressed that this evaluation proves to be very difficult when one takes a European point of view because the procedures, methods but particularly the aims of APEL are very different in the various European countries. In a very rough overview one can distinguish between six European systems of welfare provision which are corresponding to respective VET-systems, and therefore also procedures and aims of APEL. In the following there are to be found some remarks which will be expanded on in a separate paper. The systems mentioned are ideal types. All countries are encompassing mixed systems but usually with a focus on one. These countries are given as examples in brackets.

- 1) The liberal, market driven system (UK): There is no strongly structured VET-system which in principle enhances strongly the importance of APEL leading to all kinds of diplomas. As reported by our UK partners, however, the relevance of the market leads to the development that more and more only courses which pay for themselves through student fees become important. As a consequence the relevance of APEL is in decline.
- 2) The socially supportive, school based system (Sweden): The strongly structured system should provide for various kinds of continuing VET so that APEL should be geared closely to this official system. This means that APEL may expose rather different features from the ones according to No.1. But the market driven system has in recent times the system rather strongly so that now a closer relationship between the two may evolve. Still the overall importance of APEL for this system should be (and has been ?) investigated by our Swedish partner.
- 3) The school based system based on the idea of pervasive rationality (France): The system is strongly structured but the practical training aspect is not strongly represented. Therefore on the one hand APEL is in principle in contradiction to the tradition of pervasive rationality. On the other hand, because of the necessity to certify particularly practical knowledge APEL

might gain more and more importance. To the degree that the UK model of the Bachelor's degree will be introduced a course like the one designed by the University of Provence may become quite popular in this system.

- 4) The strongly structured system based on the duality between companies and schools, i. e. between the private sector and the state (Germany): The basic idea of this system is that for every occupation there is a strongly structured VET course which encompasses theory and practice. People who have not gained a certificate but have practical experience are advised to gain the former through passing an external examination, sometimes supported through preparatory courses. Therefore APEL should be used only for counselling people with regard to the question if they are able and competent to apply for this examination. But up till now APEL has played nearly no role whatsoever in this system and the trade unions which have a strong say in this system are against APEL because they are afraid that it may weaken the official system. In any case the first approaches to APEL, realised through model experiments, have aims completely different from the ones mentioned so far above. There is no intention to introduce training courses for APEL professionals independent of the level.
- 5) Transformation systems (The new central European member states, in our project: Estonia): In most of these countries there has been a combination of the socially supportive and the dual system but nowadays strong influences of the liberal market driven system are to be observed. According to experiences from European project (e.g. EPANIL) there appears to be a double structure. On the one hand the old system is prevailing, on the other hand the official policy tries to introduce features of the liberal system but with nearly no effect so far. As a consequence the possibilities of introducing APEL are still rather unclear. In any case it seems to be questionable if a training course like the one designed by our project may gain importance in the foreseeable future.
- 6) The less structured system (South of Europe): Here non-formal and informal learning is still rather important for gaining and keeping a job. On the other hand there is a strong influence of the French rational system which means that formal school based education becomes increasingly important. Therefore, in principle the preconditions for introducing APEL

are favourable because APEL, in the sense as used by our French partner links practical experience to the system of official diplomas. In addition the influence of the liberal system including the bachelor´s degree according to the Bologna process becomes more relevant so that the course as designed by the project so far might gain importance. Because there is no partner from Southern Europe in this project this can unfortunately not be proved.

This short outline shows that it is not possible to design a course for guidance professionals which is common to all systems. On the contrary it seems obvious that the respective courses have to be quite different to meet the various situations in the countries involved. The “European dimension”, that is common European features should, according to this brief analysis, be represented through a common philosophy. According to that we have proposed a structure for the handbook which contains “cornerstones” representing this common philosophy, some more or less common features for the meso level of institutional procedures and specialised sections for the different countries or systems respectively.

Nevertheless in the following we try to make some remarks which try to bridge the gap between the specific French course and the European dimension.

The evaluation is carried through from an external position and is very strongly influenced by the fact that APEL and especially APEL procedures which focus mainly on the gaining of diplomas are not well known in a lot of European countries. Furthermore we - as the German partners – are in a very specific and difficult situation because there are nearly no APEL procedures in the German context. Especially there are no APEL procedures which result in vocational or other diplomas.

In the context of the project EuroguideVAL trying to implement the Common European principles through improved guidance and counselling based on a common framework for guidance professionals two papers were submitted. The first text "Guidelines for Occupational Standards of APEL Professionals" describes in a very differentiated way the necessary action-oriented competences required to be a competent guide in the APEL process. In the Training Standards the structure and the content for a Bachelor's course for APEL professionals are outlined. Therefore these two papers are interconnected with each other. While the Occupational Standards reflect the competences necessary for professional action within the different stages of the APEL process, the Training Standards describe the contents of the modules for a bachelor's degree.

The following table aims at visualizing the correlations between Training Standards and the Occupational Standard. In principle the Training should contain the abilities needed within the occupation. On the left side there is taken up the summary of the Occupational Standards. On the right side the Training Standards are given as a set of the contents of the BA course structure. The arrows visualize in how far the two sides correspond with each other. Furthermore competencies of the occupational descriptions as well as the course contents are classified with regard to their demand for (S) **Social**, (P) **professional** or (O) **organizational** abilities and focus. This gives a good overview on the question which kind of abilities and competences are the main focus within the profession and which type of abilities are central subject of the BA course.

Correlations between Occupational Standards and Training Standards

In general it can be said that a correspondence between the *Training Standard and the Occupational Standard is obvious.*

The knowledge necessary for the understanding of social and cultural background of the candidates within stage 0 of Occupational Standard is integrated into the Training Standards under point 1.

The guidance of the candidate in the APEL system is mentioned in stage 1 of the Occupational Standard. Within the Training Standards it is integrated into points 1. up to 3.

Within the occupational profile counselling of the candidate takes place in stage 2.

This requires the most intensive contact between the candidate and his guide. The necessary professional knowledge for this is an integral part of the whole Training Standards for APEL professionals.

The preparation for the accreditation process in stage 3 requires mainly organizational competencies. The input for this is also an integral part of the whole BA course for APEL professionals.

Stage 4 of the Occupational standards focus´ on the follow-up support for the candidate. In unsuccessful cases this means further support till the aimed success is achieved. But even in successful cases follow-up support is useful because the achieving of a diploma does not necessarily mean to re-enter the labour market. In some cases the follow-up support might lead from the APEL process to a social and job re-integration project which is more situated in the area of counselling.

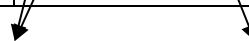
Relevance of and balance between social, professional and organizational demands

In general the Occupational Standards show a balanced demand for social, professional as well as organizational competencies. The importance of the different competencies vary between the stages in correspondence to the arising tasks.

In contrary the Training Standards focus mainly on contents which are related to professional competencies. Contents which are related to social and organizational competencies are only merely represented.

E.g. the aspect mentioned under stage 1.1 ,“Help the candidate to cope with emotional and social stress”, of the occupational standards is not sufficiently represented within the training standards. A similar situation can be identified for the positions 2.1” Help the candidate to start a transformation process” and 2.4 “Help the candidate to consolidate his/her progress” of the Occupational Standards. So it can be summarized that the demands for social competencies with regard to interacting with the candidate are insufficiently implemented into Training Standards through appropriate contexts. This is a main aspect which should be improved in order to ensure the use of the contents of the BA course for the demands of he job.

Stage O. Before starting the APEL process	P P P 0.1 Provide information about APEL		P P P Know the European policy and legal context for APEL	1. Identify and explain the legal framework and the framework for quality assurance: identify the stakeholders and appreciate their role and status.	
	O O P 0.2 Direct candidate towards APEL if justified		P P O Know the political and legal frame of APEL in one's country		
Stage 1: Help the candidate to direct himself within the APEL system	S S S 1.1 Help the candidate to cope with emotional and social stress		P P P Identify the main features of the national context.of APEL.		
	S P O 1.2 Reframe the candidate's request		O O P Know how to work in networks		
	S P O 1.3 Assist the candidate in his choice of one or two target diplomas		P P O Work on the concept of proof.		
	P P P 1.4 Declare the admissibility of the APEL application		S P O Co-evaluate APEL with the candidates		
	O O S 1.5 Put the candidate in contact with the institution that handles validation of the chosen diploma		O O P Keep oneself up to date on methods and all sorts of documents concerning APEL		
Stage 2: APEL guidance	S S P 2.1 Help the candidate to start a transformation process		P P O Conceptualize the relationship between work and experience		2. Ensure that the candidates clearly formulate the experiential knowledge derived from their non-formal and informal learning
	S S S 2.2 Communicate while keeping a critical distance towards one's own attitudes		S S O Be able to conduct interviews		
	P P O 2.3 Help to verbalise, conceptualise and formalise the experience		P P O Demonstrate familiarity with the main models of adult Training methods		3. Find one's place in the APEL system and use one's knowledge about it to conceive one's own professional project.
	S S P 2.4 Help the candidate to consolidate his/her progress		P P O Demonstrate familiarity with the main models of adult learning.		
Stage 3: Validation Occasional contributions: Chairman of jury, Jury member, Jury organiser	O O P 3.1 Organize a jury		S P O Review critically the different concepts of competence		
	P P O 3.2 Set up the validation demonstration(s)		S P P Acquire theoretical knowledge about guidance		
	P P P 3.3 Make and justify a decision		P P P Know the resources of guidance		
Stage 4 APEL Follow-up	O O O 4.1 Organise APEL follow-up		P P P Demonstrate familiarity with the main models of evaluation	4. Engage in an epistemological and ethical consideration of APEL and work on one's posture	
	O O S 4.2 Give follow-up support to candidate		P P P Become familiar with the different concepts of self		
	P P O 4.3 Validate additional Training activities		S S P work on APEL professionals' code of ethics		
			S S P Self awareness; ongoing reflection on one's professional postures		



„Guidelines for Occupational Standards of APEL Professionals“

In consideration of different requirements regarding the abilities of the guide a rather balanced demand becomes visible. Social, professional as well as organizational competencies are required. Working within the APEL process the guide has to achieve a high level of competencies in all three areas. The project defines as the main target group of the APEL process people who are mostly to be counted to the vocationally disadvantaged ones (c.f. project request S.17). Since these often come from a weak social and cultural background building up a relation with them requires a high degree of social and emotional competences of the guides.

In many cases it will depend very strongly on the interaction between the guide and the candidate, how successfully the candidate moves into the process of the APEL. If the candidate feels accepted, he/she will bring more confidence regarding the system and so he/she will be able to cover difficult requirements in which he might be involved through the APEL process. In the Training Standards it is for example represented in stage 3 (3.3), that it would be part of the work of the guides to explain the results of an examination to the candidate in a comprehensible way. This surely can not only mean objective explanations of the positive or negative result, because the guide should additionally be able to carry this through in an appropriate emotional relation with the candidate.

The counselling character of this activity becomes clear, if one imagines the situation that a candidate comes to the Guide. This person might like to do something, in order to improve his work situation and position or in order to re-enter the labour market, but he/she might even not know what he/she can undertake and where he/she wants to go.

Their experiences often are shaped very strongly by the fact that they have suffered again and again from the feedback of their environment that they are not competent enough and that they are not really needed within the labour market.

Therefore it is crucial that this target group receives support in confidence building and strengthening of their self-concept beside the organizational support with in the APEL process. This requires that the guide has at least some diagnostic abilities and that he can furthermore initiate cooperation with psychologists. This aspect should be

taken into account in the Trainings Standards as well, e.g. through the introduction of concepts of cooperation into the curriculum of the BA course.

Within the Occupational Standards it should be pointed out more clearly that appropriate support and supervision through psychologists is crucial and needs to be provided within each institution responsible for APEL processes.

Apart from these social and cultural problems the economic structure of the life circumstances of the candidates should be taken into account. In case of difficult economic structures in a region the question of the regional mobility might occur for some candidates. This means that severe barriers like the question of leaving the own social network for getting a chance of re-entrance into working life have to be faced by the candidates who need suitable support for this decision process from the guide. In this context three aspects are important. First of all it is crucial that the candidate knows the economic structures within his region as well as in other regions so that he/she is able to give advice. Secondly he/she needs to be able to evaluate if the candidate is stable enough to cope with a totally new environment if he/she moves. Thirdly it is important that the guide is not in charge of deciding whether the candidate will be supported further through social benefit.

This aspect should be explicitly taken into account for a comprehensive guidance more near. Appropriate information about the economic structures in their country as well as the promotion possibilities for a possibly necessary regional mobility should be already embodied in the Training Standards.

The description of "Guidelines for Occupational Standards of APEL Professionals" demands that the candidates of the APEL process are relatively independent. With regard to the definition of the target group the question arises how to proceed with the candidates who are not sufficiently independent and who therefore require more guidance (and support). Within the training standards there is only one hint to this aspect within range 3. Under the headline "Acquire theoretical knowledge about guidance" only listening is mentioned. The students should be introduced to numerous ways of acting in such a situation and it is not enough to focus on listening skills.

Under the heading "Know the resources of guidance" guidance is distinguished from other forms of the support. The question arises whether methods of more active support should also be included.

„Guidelines to set up Training Standards of Learning to level 6 EQF (bachelor’s degree)”

The “Guidelines represent the educational basis for the capabilities associated with a “bachelor’s degree”. As such they must provide for all knowledge and abilities for critical analysis, advisory support and decision making in this sphere of activity.

The draft of the „Guidelines to set up Training Standards of Learning to level 6 EQF (bachelor’s degree) for APEL professionals” represent in detail four areas:

- social and cultural background
- classification of clients
- methods of support
- psychological background of guidance.

This should be complemented through the areas of social interaction and basic psychological knowledge. For the representation of the relative relevance of content a measure, defined through learning hours for each point, could be specified. This would show which contents should be treated in depth and which ones serve only as background information for the activities of the guides. According to these definitions a timetable for the course could be provided.

The system of guidance according to the description “ Guidelines for occupational standards of APEL professionals” presupposes a relatively high independence of the candidates . This is often not the case particularly for disadvantaged people.

Therefore the question arises how to deal with candidates who exhibit no such independence and may require a more intensive guidance. This would, however, lead to higher requirements of personnel.

In the Training Standards, in the area 3 under “Acquire theoretical knowledge about guidance” only listening skills are mentioned. The students should however get to know various methods, since a consultation is not only limited to listening. Guidance is defined in the section “Know the resources of guidance in relation to forms of support. The question arises whether the knowledge should not also include those about other forms of support.

Altogether the critical reflection of contents relations is too little addressed concerning the social and cultural relations. The general problem of inter-cultural adaptability of the training standards is outlined in the introduction of the whole paper.

In a European perspective career counselling and guidance to obtain a diploma are often not clearly distinguished. This refers particularly to countries like Germany where the range of suitable diplomas is very limited. Therefore information about general guidance and career development should be added (See the rather comprehensive and detailed overview in the book "Career development" by Brown and Brookes. In point 3 the methods of adult education as well as the main models of adult learning are mentioned.

With the information about the European legal basis (point 1) not only the at present valid legal bases should be brought up for discussion, but also the historical background.

This would make it easier to understand the cultural differences which lead to the fact that APEL has special meanings in the various countries. It is particularly relevant to stress the fact that APEL which leads to diplomas is not implemented in many European countries.

The increase of the "action competency" of the guide in handling the candidates should be more strongly considered in the training concept. Many of the candidates have in the past too often heard "you cannot do that, you are too stupid". To communicate with these persons often requires special abilities. In stage 1 of the "Guidelines for Occupational Standards" it is outlined that guides should support the candidates in handling emotional and social stress (1.1). In addition guides will find themselves in difficult situations too, e.g. if they must reject candidates who evidently are not able to cope with the APEL process. During their training guides must be put into the position to communicate with a candidate in an emotionally appropriate way about his/her wrong judgement of the job market or of his/her own competencies.

With regard to the content of the Training Standards the following points should be added for this demand:

- to support the candidate in handling emotional and social stress (=Guidelines for Occupational Standards point 1.1)
- to keep personal distance from the problems of the candidates

- to deal with disappointed and frustrated, perhaps emotionally uncontrolled candidates

These points correlate with the aspect "Know the resources of guidance" and "Keeping an appropriate distance " which are surely necessary for a long term ability to work in this occupation. Also the points "work on APEL professionals' code of ethics" and "Self-awareness; ongoing reflection on one's postures" deal with this topic. They deal with social aspects with regard to the self-conception of the guide. However the training of the guides should not be limited to that. Most important are the social competencies which simplify working with the candidates. Education and training with regard to those competencies are essential.

As mentioned, in the European perspective it appears not to be appropriate to focus APEL mainly or even exclusively on preparing for a diploma. On the contrary, in view of the very limited opportunities on the labour market an aim of APEL should even be to support candidates looking for leisure and citizenship activities outside gainful employment. (See Socrates Grundtvig project "Interests and Desires").

With regard to the Occupational Standards there is no respective item in the Training Standards. As pointed out before however, this is, in a European perspective, a central issue. The trainees should be well aware of the fact that the separation of XXXX as outlined here is rather specific for the cultural context for which these standards are designed.