

Quality Standards

for competence assessment
with people with a migration background



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Inhalt

1. Preface	4
2. Participants	5
3. Realisation	6
4. Methods and didactics	6
5. Procedure	7
6. General conditions	8

1. Preface

The demographic development and a rapidly changing working world make new demands on the employees as well as on the vocational education. More and more often people are confronted with having to change their job, the branch or even their profession. To give oneself a new vocational orientation, it is necessary to look at one's own identity and biography. A good portion of professional skills aren't acquired at school and during vocational education, but at informal places of learning and thus they are not documented in certificates. In the future it will be a crucial criterion of the labour market to recognise such potentials and to adopt and realise them. People with a migration background are faced with an additional challenge. Their competences often stay unseen and without any acknowledgement because they can't be applied to the standards of German educational certificates.

If migrants together with their skills, experiences and motives are to be useful in our society, instruments for identification, for valuation and evaluation and for certification are necessary. At last, these instruments are needed for a social transfer of the migrant's skills and prospects into practical areas of application on and beyond the formal labour market in Germany.

Competence assessment offers the opportunity to find out and record individual abilities, skills and potentials. Skills and experiences become competences, if there is a reflection frame established, in which people can reconsider their biographic experiences and learning fields and acquire consciously their competences.

To get a preferable broad picture of someone's potentials, values and competences, it is not sufficient to look at only one part, e. g. only professional competences. Instruments for competence assessment have to be holistic and they have to record professional competences as well as key competences and individual resources. At the same time formally and informally acquired competences have to be taken into consideration.

Methods for competence assessment always have to be target-oriented. They are used for occupational orientation, for planning a career or the future or for integration into adequate supportive measures. Whenever methods for competence assessment are carried out, they have to be ruled by the principles of confidentiality, impartiality, fairness and transparency. The privacy and rights of each person have to be protected and the individual always takes centre stage.

Priority objective of competence assessment is the determination of individual competences, skills and potentials taking cultural aspects and sexual preferences into consideration. The concept development, realisation and evaluation are carried out by taking gender specific and cultural aspects into consideration. For instance, questions or tests should not be paradoxical or not be related to reality. Cultural differences (e.g. a different emphasis and valuation of values) have to be treated in a sensitive way and a mono-cultural orientation has to be abandoned.

It must be pointed out that a dialogical discussion between the participant and the qualified person can take place to give culturally caused differences space for negotiation (e.g. different classification of terms).

In terms of diversity management, all varieties are acknowledged, appreciated and used as a positive contribution. This means on the level of:

- the participants: the opportunity to determine individual competences, especially cross-cultural competence
- the personnel: the sensitisation for cross-cultural and gender specific needs and training of the own cross-cultural competence
- the methods: the avoidance of stereotypes inappropriate usage of language, promotion of trans-cultural debates
- the institution: the consideration of diversity management in models and the choice of methods

The following quality standards for competence assessment for people with a migration background were established within the framework of the specialist working team “competence assessment” within the network “Integration through Qualification” (IQ). Six development partnerships have joined within this network, promoted by the European employment initiative EQUAL, to improve equal opportunities for migrants in the labour market.

The quality standards are based on the standards developed by the BQF-project “differentiation of methods for competence assessment for (young) migrants”, which was promoted by GFBM e. V. / Berlin within the framework of BMBF. On this a comprehensive collection of material with instruments, exercises with instructions, examples and reports based on experience are released in September 2006 through GFBM e. V. .

2. Participants

Information and transparency for the participants:

The objectives, the courses of action, the used terms, the possible utilisations and the conclusions of the results have to be transparent for the participants. Are there several authorities taking part in the process of competence assessment, it also has to be transparent to the client. Data can only be circulated with the client’s agreement. To maximize the understanding supportive services according to the language level, the education level and the age should be offered (e.g. additional visualisation, space for dialogical methods, target-group specific explanations).

Free will

Methods for competence assessment should be understood as an offer for the participants and not as an obligation. The stress should be laid on the opportunity/chance that competence assessment could be the basis for self determined decision-making processes. The vital aim of the procedure and attendance should be that the participant is the active and decision-making subject, i.e. the participant uses the instrument for himself. Competence assessment should hence have the character of an accompanying self-assessment. It is important to point out that all information and answers are given voluntarily and the participants are free to not answer a question or answer it later.

3. Realisation

Qualified personnel should form, as far as possible, multi-cultural composed teams with an interdisciplinary profile. If test procedures are applied during competence assessment for analysing behaviour in certain situations, several observers are compulsory. Each individual is bound to observe and assess subjectively. Hence, more than one observer has to be deployed to support and control each other and to cope jointly with their task to the best of their knowledge.

Especially trained personnel have to be qualified in implementing methods of competence assessment and they need cross-cultural competence as well as tolerance to ambiguity. Important preconditions are, at the same time, the building of confidence and motivation as well as empathy. Basic knowledge about the German education system and vocational training and also about possibilities to pursue a career or further education is another precondition, especially if the process of competence assessment is linked to career guidance. The trained personnel have to be sensitive towards biographies with migration, cultures of learning and life situations of migrants. They have to be informed about the benefit, the objectives, the possible ways of application and the goals of procedures and methods. They have to be conscious of the utilisation of the results by the different participating institutions.

It is compulsory for the trained personnel, who work with these procedures and with the collected data from competence assessment, to attend continuous further trainings.

4. Methods and didactics

Language:

The task should conform to the participant's language level. If this does not seem possible, appropriate supportive services are necessary (e. g. visualisation of contents, translations, to work out together the goals, the work procedure step by step and the terms) or other methods of competence assessment have to be chosen. Each procedure for competence assessment should be categorised by means of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The suitable choice of methods of competence assessment for a client should conform to the classification of the language level of the user. To obtain a standardised communication about terms, the use of a glossary is essential.

Transparency in realisation and implementation:

A detailed introduction into the procedure and the approach has to take part on all parties. All parties must have a maximum chance to comprehend the objectives, the course and the meaning as well as the chances and risks of the procedure. Of course, this information is served before the individual decision to take part. For each process of competence assessment it is necessary to have an elaborated first talk, to clarify the procedure, the method and the purpose. In doing so, it is compulsory to clarify central terms, which will be used in the process of competence assessment

(e.g. the ability to communicate, the ability to work in a team). It is, thereby, vitally important to clarify the method of competence assessment, the background and the whole purpose of such procedures. At the end of the first talk the operator and the participant make a mutual agreement on the

procedure. At the same time, it is also important to point out that the operator can't be made responsible for the outcome, and that he/ she acts to the best of his/ her knowledge.

Choice of methods:

The procedure of competence assessment should connect parts which are people-oriented and standards-oriented. Furthermore, it should have a well-balanced and target group-specific mix of methods. Formal and informal learning processes should be considered. The methods have to be chosen target group-specifically and they have to consider cultural and gender-specific aspects.

5. Procedure

Objective/Process fidelity:

A process of competence assessment needs a precisely scheduled date as well as a precisely pre-established objective. Yet, in the first talk an agreement on the goal has to be made, which can be adapted to the process. At the end of the competence assessment process a final examination of the goal and a reconciliation of the agreement has to be made. Procedures and methods should be used in a differentiated way according to target group, objective and institutional framework requirements. Recommended guidelines for the procedure must not be arbitrarily adapted to changed conditions. Acting personnel should be well advised and qualified to decide about the most appropriate procedures and methods.

People-oriented and standards-oriented procedures:

Procedures of competence assessment should include people-oriented as well as standards-oriented elements, which are in a target group-specific balance.

People-oriented parts of the procedure:

Parts of the procedure, which refer to self-reflection of biographies, of individual decision-making processes and of role behaviour in a social context. They are only partly measured on standards and they are available to the participants for individual use.

Standards-oriented parts of the procedure:

Parts of the procedure, which refer to concrete standards, e. g. from working side, general and specific vocational as well as enquired personal criteria.

Competence assessment as process guidance:

Competence assessment is not simply a snap-shot of competences and potentials. It can also be the systematic guidance and documentation of results according to specified criteria of processes of competence development.

Connectivity:

A procedure of competence assessment should be of concrete use to the participants. That is, the aim of competence assessment includes the continuation of a process on the basis of the gained results. This can be an offer for consultation, qualification or work. If the process (competence assessment, consulting, and further placing) is separated, guidelines for data protection have to provide for the data transfer.

Occupational orientation / planning a career path:

Occupational orientation and planning a career path should be part of the process of competence assessment, because, thus, the participant's horizon concerning occupational opportunities is broadened in this phase and an according framework to use is given. At the same time, empowerment and a process of self-incentive is started up. Therefore, the context related to the individual as well as to the standards has to be included. By integrating occupational orientation / planning a career path the results of the process of competence assessment are put into a usable context for the participants. Occupational orientation / planning a career path within competence assessment support the transparency and the participant's self-determination about the results and their utilisation.

Self-assessment / assessment by others:

Processes of competence assessment should include not only the assessment by other people but also elements of self-assessment, which are opposed to the first ones. Thereby, the participant has to have the possibility to take an active hand in the process. The feedback should be precisely tailored to the individual. The emphasis will be on the strong points of the participant. Only the individual himself can aim for a change in attitude. Thus, the feedback is passed on to the participant in an expedient form, in terms of a possible behaviour modification. Ways of possible application are searched for, which are within the realms of the individual's potential possibilities for development. The participants of competence assessment are not just evaluated individuals; decisions are not made without considering their opinion. They are actively involved with the evaluation, to get a realistic self-assessment and to evolve decisions for their future life.

6. General conditions

Ambiance:

For an effective realisation of competence assessment procedures, an atmosphere of confidentiality has to be provided, in which the participants feel accepted and taken seriously. For that purpose, external sources of irritation (e.g. telephone, transit) have to be eliminated.

Documentation / Certification:

The results of competence assessment have to be documented and certified in accordance with the objective. Documentation means the recording of results for the internal process. The certification for external use depends on the intended use. For example, a participant will be certified with a

confirmation of participation, an examined competence will be certified with a certificate and a work result will be certified with an evaluation. Material and information has to be placed at the client's disposal.

Evaluation / Quality management:

Within an analysis of the impact of competence assessment it has to be ensured that the participants reflect the chosen procedures. The gained results will have influence on the further development of the instruments and methods and will serve a continuous improvement. At the same time, the participants' point of view always has to be taken into consideration. The results of the evaluation have to be fed back into the process and they have to be considered according to the objective, the choice of methods, the choice of qualified personnel and to the further specific organisation of competence assessment. At the same time it is essential to review to what extent gender-specific and culture-specific aspects have an impact on the process.

Realisation / Training:

To make sure that the standards can be effectively integrated into the daily work and the required quality is sustained, it is necessary to train the personnel, who operate competence assessment processes. The trainings should meet the standards and they will be certified. In the certificate, the competence assessment procedure, the number of hours, the training method and contents are described. The trained personnel is supposed to have carried out one procedure under supervision.

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