

Ö-CERT [AT-Cert] - an overall framework of quality for Adult Education in Austria

Introduction

Ö-Cert (AT-Cert) is an overall framework of quality (“umbrella label”) for adult education providers developed and recognized national wide in Austria. It was developed and is implemented by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the 9 provinces/Länder in cooperation with the most important stakeholders of adult education institutions (e.g. the Conference of Adult Education Organizations).

The implementation proceeds at macro-level (national and regional policy) and the main objective is to assure and to develop quality of provision of adult learning in Austria. Ö-Cert is an instrument for transparency of the use of QMS (quality management systems) and serves at the same time as a quality standard for granting funds and awards; not to forget that Ö-Cert constitutes an instrument of professionalization.

Ö-Cert is focussed by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research hand in hand with the 9 Länder¹ to assure and to improve the quality of structures of Adult Learning (Adult Education). At this point it is important to mention that this Austrian wide label is NOT a new QMS and does NOT substitute existing or possible future QMS: Ö-Cert recognises existing Quality Management Systems and in addition to one QMS-Certificate (according to the Ö-Cert-List; it itemise eleven accepted QMS) providers have to fulfil basic requirements of Ö-Cert (= criteria, if it is a provider of adult education).

The aim of Ö-CERT is transparency for customers/learners and for public authorities: At first glance the customers and public authority see, who’s a quality provider. Simplified administration: One certificate will be enough. It’s not necessary anymore to pass and pay for the admission to some Austrian provinces Quality Assurance Procedures. Ö-Cert is accepted all over Austria. And Ö-Cert is also a basis for subsidies – especially for customer subsidy fund by public authorities.

Concordance with other measures of staff development and program quality an overall strategy was designed. Ö-Cert is cross-linked with the “Austrian Academy of Continuing Education” (quality of staff) and with the “Initiative Adult Education” for program quality (basic skills/literacy/access to complete secondary level for early school-leavers, adults and migrants not having completed obligatory education. The “Initiative Adult Education” is just like Ö-Cert a cooperation by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the 9 Länder.

¹ Ö-CERT was officially acknowledged and the treaty based on Article 15a B-VG of the Austrian Constitution (*Bundesverfassung*) was signed by all 9 *Länder* and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and became effective with December 2011.

Background:

By the time the Austrian Adult Education is still a heterogeneous field. The Austrian Adult Education is characterized by a great number of diverse providers and offers. Depending on the definition of the target group “adult education” there exists between 1.800 and 3.000 providers. The offers are difficult to compare, no transparency for customers: So it’s hard for them to find out, who’s a Quality Provider of Adult Education.

And in Austria there are also a lot of Quality Management Systems and Quality Assurance Procedures in use (ISO, EFQM, ...). To complicate it even more during the last 20 years some of the nine Austrian provinces created their own external Quality Assurance Procedure (as a basis for subsidies for course participant). Providers with offers all over Austria or in various provinces were obliged to pass and pay for the admission to several provinces Quality Assurance Procedures. The result was a very time -consuming and expensive procedure.

For transparency, simplified administration and to promote an overall strategy of quality, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research developed Ö-CERT (AT- Cert) - in cooperation with leading Austrian experts, representatives of the nine Austrian provinces and providers of Adult education.

Structure of the quality frame Ö-CERT (how to get Ö-Cert):

1. Identification as a provider of adult education:

The provider has to fulfil basic requirements *. The criteria is to be accepted as a provider of adult education (definition of adult education):

- a. General basic requirements
- b. Basic requirements concerning the organization of the provider
- c. Basic requirements concerning the offers of the provider
- d. Basic requirements concerning principles of ethics and democracy

2. Confirmation of quality certificates:

The provider must have one of the valid Quality Management Systems or Quality Assurance Procedures – according to the Ö-Cert-List **, which itemize eleven accepted QMS and Quality Assurance Procedures. The most important selection criterion is the existence of external audits.

3. Control (check list) of applications by the Ö-CERT agency and by the accreditation group of experts.

4. Registration as one of the Quality Providers of Adult Education in Austria and receipt of Ö-Cert (actual fee: 100,00 EUR)

***Basic requirements for the acceptance into the framework of quality for adult education Ö-Cert**

A.) General basic requirements – Central paradigms of the adult education institute

1. Basic philosophy of education

Education has its own value in any stages of life: It affects political involvement, social life, professional efficiency and personal identity in a positive way. Education can be considered more than instrumental learning qualifications and further training.

2. Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning embraces all formal, non-formal and informal acquisition of knowledge in various educational centres reaching from childhood up to the stage of retirement. Lifelong learning can be defined as any act of learning with a definite goal, which serves the purpose of continuous improvement of knowledge, abilities and competences. Here "learning" is viewed as a processing of information and experiences into knowledge, insight and competences.

3. Adult education/Continuing education and training

Adult education (synonymous with continuing education and training) includes all forms of formal, non-formal and informal goal-orientated learning by adults after completion of a first stage of education varying in length and irrespective of the level that has been reached during this process. Adult education/Continuing education and training involves all vocational, political and cultural teaching and learning processes or those, which offer basic education for adults and are controlled within a public, private and economic context by others or oneself. Adult education-orientated action is based on political strategies in education, social responsibility, organisational structures as well as legal and financial requirements.

4. Definition of providers

Any type of organisation (associations, businesses, institutes, coordinating organisations of networks and cooperations), which offers adult education/continuing education and training according to the definitions set out above, can be termed providers.

B.) Basic requirements with regard to organisation

1. The organisation* requires at least one educational offer in Austria, which is characterised by regularity, plans and systematisation and must be communicated in public; transparency of provision is prevalent.

2. Adult education/ Continuing education and training is the core task of the organisation.

3. At the time of application the organisation is required to have provided measures in adult education/continuing education and training for at least 3 economic or calendar years.

4. The head of the organisation or at least one employee must have undertaken thorough pedagogical education or further training and have appropriate work experience of two years.

5. Terms of business of the organisation need to be publicly transparent and made available to the public.

* The term organisation also refers to organisational units, which demonstrate autonomy, financial responsibility, responsibility relevant to quality as well as authority to a great extent. The organisational units must show fundamental elements of an independent organisation.

C.) Basic requirements with regard to provision

1. In general the organisation's provision of education is made available publicly or if the need arises is aimed at target groups (such as women, the elderly, migrants, trainings for librarians, trade unions).

2. Offers of formal education at schools and universities are accepted, if they are aimed at adults with the purpose of gaining further qualifications within the framework of continuing education and training. Undergraduate courses of study at public and private universities, universities for applied science and pedagogical universities do not fall into this category.

3. Organisations with their offers feel under an obligation to the set out democratic values of the responsible bodies and sponsors of Ö-Cert (federal states and federal government).

4. The public libraries are key representatives in adult education/ continuing education and training. In accordance with Ö-Cert only organisations are acknowledged, which provide offers (such as courses, readings) with a focus on active impartation of knowledge.

5. Organisations, which primarily offer trainings with a focus on particular products and/or events, which are primarily tailored to customers and attract new members, are excluded by Ö-Cert. Trainings in the field of users' programmes such as Microsoft Office do not fall into the category "trainings with a focus on particular products".

6. Organisations, which provide individual guidance and counselling in the field of education and trainings as an applied method within the framework of an educational process, are acknowledged in accordance with Ö-Cert. Organisations, whose offers are exclusively aimed at individuals on a one-to-one basis, are not taken into consideration.

7. Organisations, which primarily provide activities that solely encourage the individual to engage in sports and exercise and offer leisure time activities, are not taken into consideration in accordance with Ö-Cert.

8. Organisations, which provide cultural offers, are taken into consideration in accordance with Ö-Cert, if the events serve the purpose of imparting cultural knowledge. Performances of any kind and exhibitions are not included.

9. In a religious, ideological context the organisation's intent of impartation must exceed the practical application in accordance with Ö-Cert, such as events, where propagation of faith is prevalent, are not taken into consideration.

D.) Basic requirements with regard to ethical and democratic principles

1. The organisation acknowledges the current Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This ensures that all persons irrespective of their gender and age, their education, their social and professional status, their political and ideological beliefs and their nationality have access to education. During the educational process freedom of speech is guaranteed and encouraged.
2. The organisation is under an obligation to democracy. According to this self-explanatory term no antidemocratic, racist, antisemitic and sexist materials and behaviours are accepted, neither are such materials and behaviours, which discriminate against other individuals. These materials, tendencies and behaviours are counteracted in the educational sessions. In addition the organisation does not provide any space for the propaganda of antidemocratic ideologies, it does not offer any possibility for other forms of propaganda, agitation or advertisement of products or the recruitment of "clientele" for political, religious and other ideological groups.

E.) Basic requirements with regard to quality

The organisation must hold an external certificate of quality according to enclosure 1, which has been approved of by Ö-Cert.

** Ö-Cert-List

QMS approved by Ö-CERT – context QMS in use since the 1990s and later

- ÖNORM EN ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 29990
- EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management): „committed to“, „recognised for excellence“
- LQW (Learner-Oriented Quality Certification for Further Education Organizations by Art-Set Trademark)
- QVB (used in Austrian job centres and ESF funded)
- EduQua (the Swiss quality label)
- UZB (environment-label/Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management)
- OÖ-EBQ (Quality Label of Upper Austria; adult learning VET and NON-VET)
- CERT-NÖ (Quality Label of Lower Austria and conducted by the Danube-University-Krems, adult learning VET and NON-VET)
- S-QS (Quality Label of Salzburg, adult learning VET and NON-VET)
- Wien-cert (Quality Label of Vienna, adult learning VET and NON-VET)

The current list is available on <http://oe-cert.at/weg-zum-oecert/qm-systeme.php>.

The model of Ö-CERT was developed comparing with all existing QM-Systems (school, higher education, vocational education and training), systems applied in Austria (federal republic and *Länder*) as well as those in Europe (especially in Germany: *Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung* and Switzerland: *SVEB*). A previous study on quality (INSI-QUEB) conducted by Gruber/Schlögl (2007) was re-evaluated.

Criteria for the recognition of quality management systems

1. Criterion "External assessment"

An external assessment is conducted, which is legally and in reality independent from the body/sponsor and (at least in principle) involves an on-site inspection.

2. Criterion "Extension"

The procedure can be generally applied within adult education/continuing education and training, it is not restricted to individual sectors or organisations.

3. Criterion "Restriction of certificate and ensuing procedures"

The validity of the certificate is restricted to a maximum of four years. There are explicit rules concerning monitoring and ensuing procedures.

4. Criterion "Quality" (in particular involvement of participants as well as protection of participants)

There is an explicit quality connotation, which includes involvement and protection of participants.

5. Criterion "Developmental aspect" (Constituent of the development of the organisation and staff)

During the procedure prospective developments are referred to; this reference is part of the development of the organisation and staff.

The Ö-CERT Agency (<http://oe-cert.at>) started successfully (2011). Agency costs are funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

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