

Improving the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance

(QUAL-IM-GUIDE)

Certification Procedure of Career Guidance Practitioners -

Recommendations for Organisations Providing Certification: First Steps

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## Summary

This report is providing basic guidelines for the organisations providing certification process for individual career guidance practitioners as identified within the project Improving the Implementation of Quality Assurance in Career Guidance. It may serve to the professional associations or other bodies to navigate them in establishing the certification process. These recommendations have been developed on the findings from various certification processes (Dodd et al., 2019) and on the basis of the Certification development framework (NOLOC, 2019).

### 1. Key Findings Regarding the Certification Process

Dodd and her colleagues (2019) presents a summary of various certification procedures for career guidance professionals and/or career guidance organisations collected from seven countries as well as one international standard. Hooley and Rice (2018, in Dodd et al., 2019) argues that the development of quality standards, including certification procedure, should be part of a holistic quality assurance system. There are six key domains in which quality and the certification procedure may be enacted in the delivery of career guidance:

- **Policy.** Quality assurance (QA) can help ensure career guidance is delivered in a consistent manner in line with current policy requirements.
- **Organisation.** QA can help determine whether provider organisations are designed, resourced and managed in a way that enables quality delivery.
- **Process.** QA can provide blueprints on the way organisations or individuals can reduce errors in client experience.
- **People.** QA can ensure compliance that delivery staff adhere to professional standards of the sector.
- **Output or outcome.** QA can focus on defined and measurable outcomes of clients using the service.
- **Consumption.** QA can be driven by customer satisfaction of the career guidance service.

**Certification procedures referred by Dodd et al. (2019)** (altogether 21 procedures) are:

- focused on QA in the “organisation” and “people” domains,
- focused on national labels,

- contain resources to guide the process - 35% guidance docs, 20% workshops, less than 20% mentoring (3 certification procedures out of 21),
- supported by audit tools - 63% more than one type, 68% a portfolio evidence (mostly in conjunction with other assessment methods) - difficulties to articulate how the competences are met within the portfolio may create barriers to successful certification and seem like a big challenge while formalising the certification.

According to the Dodd et al. (2019) the CP is based mainly on the **organic approach** - quality is defined by the provider and the professional driven by professional values and the desire to do a good job. Mechanisms include quality circles, supervisory arrangements, peer observation and mentoring, professional networks and local self-evaluation. There is the clear involvement of users as co-producers.

The recommendations of to overcome the barriers:

- there should be offered multiple modes of support,
- the certification procedure should be a part of policy on career guidance (increasing motivation and interest of counsellors and supporting consistent cycle of its improvement) (Dodd, et. al., 2019).

## 2. The Certification Process (CP) designed in the project QUAL-IM-G

The certification process (CP) designed in the project QUAL-IM-G is based on the Certification development framework (NOLOC, 2019) that is providing useful source for the process of designing certification procedures, such as its foundations, professional profile, testing framework, mentoring, certification and recertification process and organisational framework and on examples of existing certification procedures (see the list of references and their summary in Dodd et al., 2019).

The certification process has its focus on the self-evaluation of the career guidance practitioner's (CGP) current level of knowledge and skills and definition of self-development. Within the certification process the CGP can find out his / her actual level of professional competences, reflect the whole career guidance process and sets individual goals. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for self-reflection and focuses on quality as well. It is about *what* I do in CG and *how*

I do it - based on the **organic approach** - quality defined by the professional driven by professional values and the desire to do a good job.

**Overall the CP has its focus on QA in the “people” domain. It means QA can ensure compliance that delivery staff adhere to professional standards of the sector.**

The Quality Standard should be:

- easy to comprehend, especially in terms of what the Quality of CG is,
- useful for CGP’s clients,
- supportive for building up the community of career guidance and counselling,
- comprehensive - it should comprise all the aspects that have an effect on the quality of career guidance.

Table 1. The Certification Process - Quality Standard / Assessment Indicators

<p>NOLOC, Netherland*</p>	<p>The standard has 6 main subjects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education and skills in the field of people-oriented services (at least on level EQF-6)</li> <li>- Relevant working experience in the field of career guidance, career advice, outplacement or work reintegration; still being active in this field / fields as a guidance professional</li> <li>- Relevant theoretical and practical knowledge of careers, labour market and their interaction</li> <li>- Relevant theoretical knowledge and practical experience of methods, techniques and instruments</li> <li>- Mastering the most important competences of a career professional, coach and advisor: empathy, effective communication, reflection, advising / coaching</li> <li>- Showing a professional attitude: self-reflection, acting ethically</li> </ul>
<p>WBA, Austria*</p>	<p>On the basis of a two-level modular qualification profile, the relevant competences are submitted and recognised.</p> <p>WBA-Certificate: Certified Adult Educator -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational theory Skills</li> <li>- Didactic Skills</li> <li>- Management Skills</li> <li>- Counselling Skills</li> <li>- Librarianship and Information Management Skills</li> <li>- Social Skills</li> <li>- Personal Skills</li> <li>- General optional modules (foreign languages or ICT-knowledge) can be proven</li> <li>- Compulsory optional modules to the extent of 9 ECTS (wba) must be proven</li> </ul> <p>In addition, they must have at least 500 hours of practical, hands-on experience (at least 1 year).</p> <p>WBA-Diploma: Graduate Adult Educator - in addition to the above</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Science-oriented thesis (with focus on the chosen specific area, ie. either teaching, educational management, counselling or librarianship and information management)</li> <li>- Specialist literature and book reviews</li> </ul> <p>In addition, they must have at least 400 hours of practical, hands-on experience (at least 4 years) in adult counselling.</p>
ECGC, Austria*	<p>In case of the degree of Academic Expert these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge about labour market dynamics, the professional world, educational portfolios and basic aspects of counselling</li> <li>- communicational and conflict management skills</li> <li>- practical skills in coaching, assessment and placement service</li> <li>- professional ethics</li> <li>- self-learning skills</li> <li>- reflective skills</li> <li>- stress management</li> <li>- academic writing, methods and research skills</li> </ul> <p>In case of the consecutive Master's degree, skills in the following fields must be acquired in addition to the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge about guidance in an international context</li> <li>- organizational development</li> <li>- knowledge and information management</li> </ul>
BBR, Germany*	<p>The BBR manages the registration and certification according to the statutes of its organization. The quality standards are based on external standards (German association for educational and vocational counselling dvb e.V., IVSBB-AIOSP and other recommended standards).</p>

The certification process contains **a self-assessment tool and a two-part mentoring programme** to guide the process and is supported by **a portfolio evidence** as an audit tool. The goal of the self-assessment and the mentoring programme is to **be prepared for the certification**.

Several rules need to be respected for its successful implementation:

- CGP accept change when they believe it makes sense.
- CGP accept the change positively when they believe it will also bring something to them personally.
- CGP accept change when they believe the organisation is serious about it and has the necessary professional capacities.

## 2. 1. The Self-assessment tool

Self-evaluation is supposed to be a thorough process that enables CGPs to be critically reflective about themselves as a professionals and about their practice.

Self-evaluation should support them to:

- reflect on what they have done,
- think about what they might do next,
- identify and focus on areas they wish to develop expertise or accomplishment,
- consider their own progress and development and career planning,
- deeply understand their professional practice, their professional learning and their impact on their thinking, professional actions and the learning of their clients.

The Self-assessment tool (Tool) designed within the project involves:

- deep and searching questions about self and practice,
- (the XY's)<sup>1</sup> Quality Standards to inform and guide the CGP's reflections,
- other influencing factors such as ethical principles and other issues relevant to the particular context,
- application of the CGP's ongoing reflections and enquiry into practice,
- evidence from a range of sources to inform and support the self-evaluation.

The Tool allows to engage in a reflective evaluation more critically and provides the opportunity for better understanding of oneself and one's practice. It uses reflective questions regarding the current state of self and practice as well as those focused on the future development and action planning. For more detailed advice, guidance and counselling regarding the self assessment, practitioners may use the mentoring programme which is a part of the CP in order to support CGPs in preparation for the certification.

Table 2. The Certification Process - Internal / External Assessment

NOLOC, Netherland*	internal assessment only (self-assessment and assessment by colleagues)
CMI, Netherlands*	external assessment only
WBA, Austria*	both internal and external assessment
ECGC, Austria*	both internal and external assessment
BBR, Germany*	both internal and external assessment
WBH, Germany*	both internal and external assessment

<sup>1</sup> The certification process is designed to be applicable to various quality standards models.

## 2. 2. The Mentoring Programme

The mentoring programme contains

- self-study learning **modules** focused on specific topics identified as the most important for CGPs (for more details see project website: [www.guidancequality.eu](http://www.guidancequality.eu)),
- group **mentoring** facilitated by a mentor (experienced professional educated in mentoring) based on self-reflection and peer learning.

In case the need was specified by the CGP or the mentor there should be the possibility to offer one-by-one mentoring. It depends on the capacity of the professional association and its agreement with the mentor (association member).

Table 3. The Certification Process - Support for CG Practitioners

NOLOC, Netherland*	There is a description of the Noloc assessment framework, in which all assessment requirements are explicitly mentioned. In this framework, the requirements of the documents itself that need to be handed in are also described. In addition, there is a guidance document available, describing the requirements and the ways they could be proven in more detail. For individual candidates who are a member of Noloc, there is the possibility – on a voluntary basis – to make use of a mentoring programme.
CMI, Netherlands*	The mentoring programme is essential for individuals in order to meet the quality standard.
WBA, Austria*	WBA-advisers guide candidates through the certification process. WBA acknowledges prior learning results and offers guidance and counselling as far as the acquisition of missing skills is concerned. Lack of competences can be made up by attending further courses or by submitting further evidence. However, WBA does not offer further education programmes itself but accredits suitable courses offered by various AE institutions throughout Austria.
ECGC, Austria*	The courses required are offered at Danube University Krems itself. At WIFI, respective voluntary preparation courses are offered in addition to the assessment centre and electronic exams themselves.
BBR, Germany*	The BBR e.V. is not an employer of career guidance counsellors and the statutes also do not define the BBR e.V. as a provider of training, qualification etc. The registration itself and the publication of registered counsellors is a result of the demand for qualified, professional counselling. The German Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (dvb) however provides relevant training courses on the website and in its internal newsletter (dvb-info).
WBH, Germany*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guidance documents</li> <li>- Workshops</li> <li>- Consultation</li> </ul>

	- Supervision
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### 2. 3. The Portfolio

Although a professional portfolio performs many other functions (representation, evaluation, etc.) the CGP's portfolio within the certification process links to the **preparation for the certification**.

The **minimum content** of the portfolio is:

- the evidence of formal education and trainings in the field,
- the evidence of the quantity of the experience,
- CV,
- the completed self-assessment tool,
- case study.

Table 4. The Certification Process - Required Content of the Portfolio

NOLOC, Netherland*	Curriculum vitae, written casus, supporting documents showing proof of the required education and other requirements are being judged by the assessor. In case the assessor has doubts whether the candidate fulfils the requirements, the files will be judged by a second assessor.
WBA, Austria*	<p>WBA-Certificate: Certified Adult Educator - Adult educators can submit competences and practical experience acquired in various ways and with different types of proofs. These supporting documents are assessed on the basis of the wba-qualification profiles and then acknowledged. In addition to that, the candidates have to take part and pass the "Certification Workshop", a three-day-assessment including a test on educational theories. The certification workshop has examination character. At the same time it is set up in a way that is appropriate to help participants develop a broadened self-perception and an enhanced identification with their role as adult educators.</p> <p>WBA-Diploma: Graduate Adult Educator - First, candidates have to prove that they have acquired all of the required competences in a formal or informal way. Second, they have to write a theory-guided, work-related thesis on a subject from the area they specialise in. When all of the competences required have been substantiated and approved by the accreditation board, candidates can take the final exam ("Kolloquium"). During the "Kolloquium" they present their thesis and describe its relevance to their work as adult educators. The members of the commission pose questions concerning the written thesis and lead a discussion on topics of relevance to adult education.</p>
ECGC, Austria*	Relevant professional experience is a prerequisite to enter the programme at all. To acquire the degree of academic expert, one must pass an assessment centre (assessing practical counselling and guidance skills as well as general social skills, as detailed above), an online test at the WIFI

	(testing knowledge skills, as detailed above), and a course at the DUK itself (dealing with research and academic methods), as well as submit a project thesis. To reach a Master's degree, one must attend several further courses, dealing with subject matter as mentioned above, and write a Master's thesis.
BBR, Germany*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualification, certificates, diplomas</li> <li>- Proof of employment as a guidance counsellor</li> <li>- Specific knowledge about educational and professional training systems, occupational profiles and labour market structures in the form of certificates or as a self-report</li> <li>- Certificates or a self-report about the methods the applicant uses in his/her job of career guidance counselling</li> <li>- Commitment to the "Ethical Standards" of the IAEVG/AIOSP</li> </ul>

Further examples of evidence in the portfolio are:

- reflections on professional dialogue with clients, peers, colleagues,
- individual critical reflections on practice,
- analysis of client work, individual or group focused,
- analysed practitioner talk (from audio and/or video recording),
- analysed client talk (individual, group and pair),
- analysis of surveys taking account the views of clients and colleagues,
- reflection on and analysis of consultations / group sessions with clients,
- analysis of visual data, artefacts,
- analysed quantitative, statistical data sets, online platforms, websites, activities on social medias etc.

Ideal platform for the quality standard and certification process is online portfolio where reflections of CGP's work, outcomes, achieved descriptors and his/her profile can be edited on long term basis. The quality profile of CGP can be approved by an independent mentor. The mentor if he/she is asked to do so can look at the portfolio and confirm the achieved self-evaluated outcomes and a proof of the quality.

### 3. The stages of The Certification Process

#### 3. 1. Completion of the minimum entry requirements

In order to keep the CP and certification as available as possible it is not appropriate to set entry level requirements what may create barriers to successful certification. This ensures availability and clarity of the qualification standard.

The **minimum entry requirements** are:

- application for certification,
- CGP's professional portfolio that meets the requirements.

Those interested in certification when completing the self-assessment tool may be of the opinion that it would be appropriate to use some thematic modules in order to learn topics in which they see space for development. In addition, he / she can enroll in a group mentoring programme, eventually use individual mentoring.

Table 5. The Certification Process - Entry Requirements

NOLOC, Netherland*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education and skills in the field of people-oriented services (at least on level EQF-6)</li> <li>- At least 3 years of general work experience</li> <li>- At least the following specific professional experience in the broad field of career advice, career coaching, outplacement and reintegration:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- at least 1 year working for at least 18 hours per week</li> <li>- or at least 750 hours of specific professional experience</li> <li>- or at least 25 clients with at least 30 hours of time investment per client</li> </ul> </li> <li>- furthermore, the CV shows that you are currently still working in the career profession</li> <li>- CV</li> <li>- Case study</li> <li>- Application (while signing it the candidate states he/she uses self-reflection and works acc. to the Noloc ethical conduct)</li> </ul>
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### 3. 2. The Certification

The CGP interested in the certification is contacted by an evaluator. The evaluator may be a mentor operating in the role of the evaluator and the mentor may be a person who has already completed the certification process and regularly attends education / trainings for mentors. The mentor works with the CGPs and the objective is to reflect on whether their submitted portfolio corresponds to the quality standard descriptors. The mentor can be chosen from publicly available list (e. g. published on the website). A person who acts as a mentor in the CGP's certification process should not act as an assessor for the same CGP.

If the portfolio complies with the descriptors of the standard, the evaluator issues a certificate. The certificate may reflect the level of points earned in the certification and is recommended to issue it time-limited (e.g. valid for 24 months).

Table 6. The Certification Process - Certification Levels

CMI, Netherlands*	The quality standard Registered Career Guidance Professional / RL, has 3 levels: A, B, and C. Differences between levels are mainly in orientation of the career services provided by the individual professional (candidate, candidate and client, candidate and client and organization) and the number of years of (specific) working experience of the individual applying for the quality standard.
WBA, Austria*	<p>WBA Certificate - the wba-certificate is aimed at candidates already working in adult education. To acquire the wba certificate, competences in various fields (see above) must be acquired (30 ECTS credits). The candidates subsequently supply missing qualifications.</p> <p>WBA Diploma - the wba-diploma is aimed at those who specialise in one of the four areas of adult education (either in a teaching, advisory, pedagogically responsible, organizational, managerial or librarianship capacity) and demonstrate a wide range of practically applicable experience as well as theoretical knowledge.</p>
ECGC, Austria*	<p>Applicants must prove a certain level of professional experience before entering the study programme itself, depending upon the desired level of certification and whether or not they have acquired the usual higher education entrance qualifications. In addition, they have to submit a letter of intent.</p> <p>Academic Expert Programme: Admission requires either 2 years of professional experience within the field of career guidance and a general higher education entrance qualification OR 5 years of professional experience without the latter and completed relevant training courses. Afterwards, one must successfully complete the electronic exam, assessment centre and course as mentioned above, and finally submit a project thesis.</p> <p>Master of Arts Programme: Admission to the consecutive Master's programme requires either: a previously acquired academic degree OR a higher education entrance qualification and 4 years of relevant professional experience, relevant training periods included OR 8 years of relevant professional experience, including training periods, without any further qualifications. In case of the latter, admission is granted only after an interview at the DUK. During the programme itself, one must complete three further courses at the DUK, and submit a Master's thesis.</p>
WBH, Germany*	Individuals have to attend a three-day seminar, thereafter they have to submit a written composition and describe their consultation concept as well as two case descriptions. Then they have to pass an oral examination.

### 3.3 Recertification

The certification itself may be valid for a limited period of time (e.g. 24 months) in sense to assure continuous quality development. Therefore, the recertification process needs to be specified within the providing organisation as well as clarify for the practitioners, e.g. process and requirements of the recertification, possible additional payments.

Table 7. The Certification Process - Recertification

NOLOC, Netherland*	After the initial certification, the professional will need to recertificate every 3 years in order to keep the status 'Noloc Acknowledged Career Professional'. This recertification is based on showing proof of one's own professional development (at least 40 hours per year).
CMI, Netherlands*	<p>The certification procedure and the recertification procedure are alike. The recertification assessment consists of 2 elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Judging the documents / written file handed in by the candidate as proof of meeting the recertification criteria.</li> <li>2. An interview with the so called review committee, consisting of two members: a Registered Career Guidance Professional (RL) and an independent chairman, being an academic professor in the field of career guidance.</li> </ol> <p>In the written file they have to mention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Report concerning development advice with reference to the previous (re)certification,</li> <li>- Participations in a course, training, workshop, seminar, conference, modules or systems of structural education or organized meeting with colleagues.</li> </ul>
BBR, Germany*	<p>No repetitive control of preconditions such as university diploma, specific knowledge (see 13.), commitment to "Ethical Standards".</p> <p>Recertification though needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- continuing education (specific for subjects and methods to career guidance counselling; a minimum of 60 lesson units),</li> <li>- supervision (a minimum of 20 hrs.),</li> <li>- proof of employment as a career guidance counsellor (regular activity with a minimum of 20 hrs. a month).</li> </ul>

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Table 5. The Certification Process - Entry Requirements

Table 6. The Certification Process - Certification Levels

Table 7. The Certification Process - Recertification

### \* References

NOLOC, Netherland	Noloc, beroepsvereniging van loopbaanprofessionals en jobcoaches
CMI, Netherlands	Register Loopbaanprofessional / Registered Career Guidance Professional Issued by CMI, Career Management Institute Netherlands
WBA, Austria	Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (WBA) certificate "Certified Adult Educator"/WBA diploma "Graduate Adult Educator (with focus on counselling)"
ECGC, Austria	European Career Guidance Certificate (ECGC), e.g. academic degrees Academic Expert and Master of Arts (MA) in Educational and Vocational Guidance
BBR, Germany	BBR-BerufsBeratungsRegister (Career guidance Register, Germany)
WBH, Germany	Qualitätsstandards für Beratungspersonen im Feld Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung. (Quality Standards for Guidance Practitioners in the Area of Education, Career and Employment) Weiterbildung Hessen e.V. (Adult Education Hessen)

### Sources

Dodd, V., Haug, E. H., Hooley, T., & Neary, S. (2019). *Quality Assurance Standards. A synthesis of quality standards across partner countries*. Derby: University of Derby/QUAL-IM-G.

NOLOC (2019). *Certification development framework: assuring the quality of career practitioners*. QUAL-IM-G.

## Annex no. 1 - Certification Report - Example



## Certification Report

Certification documents	Quality Standards for Career Guidance Practitioners (CGP) Portfolio of the CGP inc. his/her self-assessment questionnaire
Date	
Name / CGP	
Name / assessor	
Certification Result	<input type="checkbox"/> The requirements arising from the certification criteria are met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> It is recommended to grant a certificate for 2 years.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> It is recommended to extend the certificate by 2 years.</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> The requirements arising from the certification criteria are not met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> It is necessary to meet repeatedly with the assessor.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> New / modified docs need to be submitted.</li> </ul>
Assessor / summary (comments, notes, recommendations, suggestions for improvement)	
CGP / summary (comments, notes, recommendations, suggestions for improvement)	

Assessor's signature

CGP's signature



## Certification Report

### Observed requirements

Quality Standards	Compliance (number of points) according to the self-evaluation questionnaire
<b>Total</b>	

CGP Beginner	... points	<input type="checkbox"/>
CGP Experienced	... points	<input type="checkbox"/>
CGP Expert	... points	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Overall certification evaluation

	yes	partly	no
The level of compliance with the quality criteria is demonstrated on the basis of the self-assessment questionnaire and the portfolio.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The self-assessment questionnaire and other evidence of the portfolio are reflected in the set goals and the level of their fulfillment is regularly evaluated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The findings and the potential for development from the last certification have been incorporated. Suggestions for improvement and recommendations have proven effective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>