

Rebecca Atanassov | Ulrich Best | Vira Bushanska | Katharina Gilljohann

Routes to equivalence – recognition-related training courses in medical professions and dual occupations

Results of the BIBB Recognition monitoring



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Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
Robert-Schuman-Platz 3 53175 Bonn
Internet: www.bibb.de
E-Mail: zentrale@bibb.de



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Key points in brief

Within the context of professional recognition, a considerable need for training arises in the case of skilled workers with foreign qualifications. The ongoing trends in respect of applications relating to third country qualifications, notices which “impose” a compensation measure or only attest to partial equivalences and new developments in the wake of the Skilled Immigration Act (FEG) all indicate that requirements will probably continue to rise. Measures instigated as part of the 2021–2025 Coalition Agreement with a view to facilitating the immigration of qualified workers are also likely to exacerbate demand (cf. SPD/BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN/FDP 2021). Although the expansion of relevant training provision has been recognised as a joint task for the Federal Government, the federal states and trade and industry via vehicles such as the National Integration Action Plan, a clear overall picture of the existing services and present challenges has yet to emerge. The latest study undertaken by the BIBB Recognition Monitoring Project delivers current findings on fundamental issues of organisation, provision and demand, on regional differences, on matching and on the financing of training programmes. One of the focuses is on the regulated professions which attract the highest number of applications – doctor and registered general nurse. The study also looks at non-regulated professions in trade and industry and in the craft trades sector. The following results were arrived at on the basis of qualitative interviews conducted in 2020 with training providers, competent bodies, sub-projects from the “Integration through Qualification” (IQ) Funding Programme, employers and other relevant stakeholders in selected federal states.

There is a considerable requirement for recognition-related training measures in all occupational fields investigated.

- A high need for knowledge tests and appropriate preparatory courses is revealed in the case of doctors and registered general nurses. This is connected with a significant increase in applications involving third-country qualifications and in the number of notices “imposing” a compensation measure. In 2019, more than half (57%) of the 2,445 procedures relating to third-country qualifications in human medicine which led to a positive outcome were preceded by a knowledge test. In nursing, the same was true for 44 percent of the 4,551 third-country qualification cases resulting in a positive decision.
- The available data also confirms a high degree of interest in refresher training and in relevant guidance in the non-regulated occupations which fall within the area of responsibility of the chambers of commerce and industry (IHKs) and the chambers of crafts and trades (HWKs). Partial equivalence was attested in 3,165 procedures in 2019 (48%). Between 1 January 2019 and 30 June 2020, over 3,700 persons in dual occupations received guidance on training within the IQ Funding Programme alone. The training itself, however, was not always forthcoming.

In the medical professions investigated, structures for the organisation of knowledge tests differed between federal states in terms of a number of details. Although multifarious provision of training measures is in place, shortages or challenges in some areas make participation more difficult.

- The stakeholder structure for the organisation and implementation of knowledge tests is quite heterogeneous in nursing in particular. In some federal states, for example, theoretical tests are conducted either by or in the presence of the competent bodies. In others, the competent bodies delegate the organisation and execution of the tests to schools of nursing.
- When it came to obtaining a date for the knowledge test, there were reports of capacity bottlenecks and long waiting times for doctors especially. In nursing too, there is evidence in some cases of shortages in respect of the theoretical parts of the test.
- Persons who do not have links with an employment agency or an employer may find it harder to gain access to knowledge tests and preparatory courses in nursing.

The necessity of organising measures individually constitutes a particular challenge in the non-regulated IHK and HWK occupations. Guidance plays a crucial role here.

- Provision varies widely depending on the federal state and the occupation. However, the interviews show that access to appropriate guidance services is supported by established cooperation arrangements between relevant stakeholders and that a sufficient level of provision is thus ensured. Both the IQ projects and the chambers are in possession of extensive experience. Thanks to individual design concepts and comprehensive coordination with training providers, this means that precisely matched training measures can be instigated.
- The major challenges are the high costs associated with providing guidance and making arrangements for the individual organisation of refresher training, a lack of reliable financing and the low level of planability for education and training providers.

There remains a need for more flexible training formats and for particular support within the scope of acquiring skilled workers from abroad.

- Compatibility between training and employment, the possible problem of striking the right work-life balance and the mobility of participants continue to be considered as challenges in every area investigated.
- Skilled workers still living abroad face major difficulties with regard to identification of suitable measures, financing and the organisation of training.

Conclusions

- Particular consideration should be accorded to the training needs of those seeking recognition, especially in light of the consequences of the coronavirus crisis. Migrants working in unqualified employment generally more severely affected by the impacts of the pandemic are less likely to take part in occupationally related continuing training.
- Because the current IQ funding period expires at the end of 2022 and given the expected increase in demand that will occur due to the FEG and announcements of new measures for the 2021–2025 legislative period, the issue of financing is increasingly gaining in relevance. Existing funding opportunities for companies must continue to be publicised, and there is a further need to support certification so that mainstream funding can be put in place. Special solutions will be also necessary, for example for persons who are not entitled to access regular assistance or for participation in inter-company apprentice instruction (ÜLÜ courses) in non-regulated occupations.
- **In the case of doctors**, an increase in test capacities will be required in order to counter longer waiting times. Acquiring doctors to conduct the tests and setting up new locations to carry out the practical element of the knowledge test may be significant factors here.
- Employers should continue to be made aware of the benefit of preparatory courses. This may be one way of making it easier to link theoretical and practical elements when candidates are preparing for the knowledge test. Doctors who have obtained a licence to practice and are now working could be seconded for this purpose. Another possibility would be the integration of observation visits into the preparatory course.
- **In nursing**, employers frequently organise preparatory courses for the knowledge test. Applicants who have no employer links may find it a challenge to access courses and tests. One point of discussion here should be the creation of incentives for schools of nursing in order to make such tests more readily available to external candidates.
- In some federal states, a multitude of stakeholders are involved in organising and conducting knowledge tests. An investigation should take place as to whether this complexity can be decreased. This would reduce the amount of resources needed to coordinate the stakeholders involved and would also shorten possible waiting times for applicants. The process for applicants and institutions would also be made more transparent.

- *In the non-regulated occupations in the area of responsibility of the IHKs and HWKs* , the main emphasis needs to be on maintaining or expanding provision of individual guidance and support for the organisation of matched training so that this can be made available to skilled workers and companies in a sustainable way right across the country. Support for companies and the further raising of awareness by means such as reliable information on financing and on current regulations in residency law and accident insurance could help to encourage training. The promotion of inter-company training centres/apprentice workshops may facilitate more flexible and more timely entry into the measures.
- Better findability of courses and comparability of provision may make orientation easier for skilled workers in all occupational areas investigated. Work-life balance can also be improved further, for instance via modularised provision and agreements with education and training providers and employers.