

Quality Principles

of Vocational Training and Professional Development in the Field of Outdoor & Experiential Education

for members of the *Bundesverband Individual- und Erlebnispädagogik e.V. (be)*
[German Federal Association for Individual and Outdoor & Outdoor &
Experiential Education]

- Last updated: 17th February 2015 -

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Preamble..... | 2 |
| 2. Ethical Principles | 3 |
| 3. What is “Outdoor & Experiential Education”?..... | 3 |
| 4. Competence Orientation in Vocational Training and Professional Development..... | 4 |
| 5. Quality Criteria for Vocational Training and Professional Development Programmes | 6 |
| 6. Main Content of Vocational Training and Professional Development Programmes..... | 8 |
| Verification / Declaration of Commitment..... | 9 |
| 7. Appendix | 9 |
| 7.1 | 9 |
| 7.2 | 9 |

1. Preamble

The German market for Vocational Training and Professional Development in the field of Outdoor & Experiential Education offers a wide range of service providers and programmes, teaching content and curricula as well as degree and certificates.

In light of this (desirable) diversity, a work group was founded within the *Bundesverband Individual- und Erlebnispädagogik e.V. (be)* [German Federal Association for Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education] in 2008 with the aim of ensuring a fundamental level of quality for those interested or participating in such courses or programmes.

The overriding goal of this permanent work group is to develop joint standards of quality and implement them in a respective certification scheme within the association in order to foster the professionalisation regarding the Vocational Training and Professional Development of experiential educators in Germany, thereby also promoting their job profile. Sharing the results beyond Germany's borders by regularly exchanging information with colleagues in all German-speaking countries is both possible and desirable.

Since 2008, the work group has convened and exchanged ideas regularly, thereby developing the following joint standards¹. Great emphasis was placed on ensuring that all the association's members as well as interested persons without an affiliation to the association were always invited to collaborate, that more members from different backgrounds were actively involved, and that interim results were accessible at all times and also published.

Following a resolution by the general assembly, the fundamental quality principles presented in this document are binding for the members of the *Bundesverband Individual- und Erlebnispädagogik e.V. (be)* who – as individuals, institutions, companies or associations – offer, advertise, sell and carry out Vocational Training and Professional Development in the field of Outdoor & Experiential Education.

By becoming a *be* member, the provider of Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education commits himself/herself to adhering to the fundamental quality principles adopted by *be*. To ensure compliance, each member signs a “declaration of commitment”, and random checks are carried out by the Executive Committee or its agents. The Fundamental Quality Principles can be accessed at any time by contacting the *be* office, and are available in writing to all persons involved carrying out in the training courses (henceforth referred to as educators).

Courses that do not fulfil the minimum standards outlined in this document are considered “additional training without qualification” and are not allowed to award the professional title “Experiential Educator” or “Experiential Educator BQ”².

We are especially grateful to everybody involved in this process and this product for their openness, their constructive input and their creativity!

¹ First edition 8th March 2011, latest edition 17th February 2015

² BQ = basic qualification

2. Ethical Principles

be members who offer Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education commit themselves to upholding the values as defined in Article 1 of the Professional Code of Ethics of the *Forum Werteorientierung für die Weiterbildung e.V.* [Forum on Value Orientation in Further Training]³:

The ethical principles of experiential educators within *be* are based on the self-perception of a value system rooted in human rights. Furthermore, they take on social and societal responsibility regarding each individual's character development and his/her ability to form an emancipated opinion. These programmes help foster and develop education issues. In addition, *be* members providing Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education commit themselves to acting in a sustainable manner. The aim is to find an equilibrium between ecological, economic and social factors.

The aim of implementing these ethical principles, the aspects of sustainable development, and work based on mutual respect and responsibility is to ensure transparency within and outside of the provider of Vocational Training and Professional Development, to build up trust with clients and partners, to demonstrate quality and to work in a future-oriented manner.

As regards advertisement, it is therefore important to avoid wilfully deceiving persons interested or participating in such programmes. The comprehensive written information made available at the beginning of the Vocational Training and Professional Development course must subsequently be implemented. This transparency is essential for protecting clients' interests as well as the profession's reputation.

If within *be* an individual or a company offering Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education intend to use their programme to convey ideological, ethical, religious or political opinions, then they must clearly inform the clients, those responsible for making decisions, and persons interested or participating in such programmes.

As providers of Vocational Training and Professional Development within *be*, we are aware of the fact that we bear great responsibility, especially when working with younger people. For that reason, we place great importance on sensitizing participants of Vocational Training and Professional Development courses to the different types of physical and emotional violence, especially sexual abuse.

3. What is “Outdoor & Experiential Education”?

Contrary to popular belief that experiential educators mainly work in the field of (social) education, it can be observed especially in English-speaking countries that there are in fact more options, which are also increasingly becoming the focus of attention in German-speaking countries. In general, the field in which persons who have completed a vocational or further training course in Outdoor & Experiential Education later work can be divided into four main areas: education, health promotion, tourism, and business.

- In education, experiential educators work with children and young people, for example,

³ For a precise definition, see Appendix 7.1

with child welfare services, and in education-related activities both in- and outside of schools and in tertiary education, as well as in adult education.

- In health promotion, experiential educators work in the fields of prevention and rehabilitation, for example.
- In tourism, experiential educators can work for tour operators and alpine schools, tourist information offices, hotels, clubs and camps, to name but a few.
- In business, experiential educators can work as facilitators and coaches in management training courses, for example.

In our opinion, there are numerous spheres of activity concerning Outdoor & Experiential Education in German-speaking countries, yet to date there is no universally accepted definition of the term “Outdoor & Experiential Education”. Publications in specialist literature have made many different attempts at explaining this term, whereby some definitions diverge significantly. For that reason, the Working Group has focused on the field of “Outdoor & Experiential Education” and – based on the current opinions of those involved – tried to come up with a definition of its own:

“Outdoor & Experiential Education” according to *be*: “We work based on a pedagogical concept, in a future-oriented manner and preferably out in nature or in a semi-natural setting with the main aim of fostering self- and social competences.”

This definition is based on an interconnected construct of main principles, methods and models:

- The main principles include: action orientation, holism, personal responsibility, voluntariness, challenge by choice, safety and sustainability; embedding our education-, competence- and resource-oriented work in the current legal framework and in educational policy;
- The methodical aspects include: the significance of the experience and working in an Outdoor & Experiential Education setting, not-everyday challenges and adventures, using nature and different types of media as the preferred setting for learning and experiences, increased self-organisation of groups;
- The learning and effect models in Outdoor & Experiential Education include: the comfort zone model, the metaphor model, the action/reflexion cycle, and the flow model.

4. Competence Orientation in Vocational Training and Professional Development

Today, in the field of education (including character building) as well as in Vocational Training and Professional Development, the term “competence” is becoming increasingly popular, which is why there is a lot of discussion about “competence enhancement”. It has been shown that people with different socialization backgrounds enter into education with quite different competences. These competences are developed or specifically trained throughout each person’s lifetime.

In general, competences describe behavioural dispositions and potential in terms of abilities, skills, strategies and – if applicable – attitudes. The focus is placed on the individual and his/her action competence. While this individual action competence must be seen from a holistic point of view, it is both sensible and convenient to divide it into sub-competences in order to define content in Vocational Training and Professional Development or to initiate a targeted intervention, for example.

As a result, it makes sense to distinguish between self-competence, social competence and technical competence, whereby technical competence includes methodical and professional competence. As regards an experiential educator's job profile, it is also common to distinguish between sub-fields personality, (social) education and technical-instrumental competence.

As regards competence orientation, *be* members who offer Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education are required to describe the content and goals of their respective programmes in terms of both quantity and quality.

In this respect, the experiential educator's "personality" is considered particularly important. Special focus is placed on competences such as authenticity and empathy, dialogue ability and flexibility, self-reflection and the ability to work under pressure.

In order to describe the Vocational Training and Professional Development programmes in terms of quality, especially with regard to the respective prerequisites and degrees, *be* members use the "German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning" (DQR)⁴ as orientation.

For the first time a comprehensive, cross-functional training tool is used by introducing DQR which recognizes acquired skills and makes them comparable. As the national implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) it takes the peculiarities of the German educational system into account, and additionally, achieves appropriate evaluation and comparability of German qualifications in Europe. The DQR has, like the EQF, eight levels. While the EQF distinguishes between "knowledge", "skills" and "competencies" and "personal competence" the DQR distinguishes between "professional competence", subdivided into "knowledge" and "skills", as well as "personal skills", subdivided into "social skills" and "self-reliance". Together with a "level indicator", that represents the characteristic of a level requirement structure collectively, these components form a level description.

be members who offer Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education are required to specify the following statements taken from the "German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning" with regard to the prerequisites, the content to be conveyed and the examinations for their respective programmes.

| Level 4 | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Having skills to independently design and process problems in a comprehensive, evolving learning area or professional field. | | | |
| Professional competence | | Personal competence | |
| Knowledge | Skills | Social Competence | Self-Reliance |
| Having a comprehension of deeper general knowledge or having professional theoretical knowledge in a learning area or a professional working field. | Having a wide range of cognitive and practical skills including problem solving techniques, knowledge of evaluation methods as well as the ability to offer alternative actions and interactions with adjoining fields. Providing transfers. | Helping to shape working issues and an appropriate learning environment in a group/team and offering continuously support. Justifying processes and results. Comprehensively communicating issues. | Focusing and targeting learning and working objectives. Reflecting, realising coherences, and taking responsibility. |

⁴ http://www.dqr.de/media/content/Der_Deutsche_Qualifikationsrahmen_fue_lebenslanges_Lernen.pdf

| Level 5 Having skills for independent planning and processing of comprehensive professional tasks in a complex, specialized, changing learning area or professional field. | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Professional competence | | Personal competence | |
| Knowledge | Skills | Social Competence | Self-Reliance |
| Having integrated expertise in one learning area or via integrated professional knowledge in a field of activity. This includes in-depth professional-theoretical knowledge. Knowing the scope and limits of the learning area or professional field. | Having a very broad spectrum of specialized cognitive and practical skills. Planing work processes, also interdisciplinarily, judging and comparing them with alternatives and interactions with adjoining fields. Providing comprehensive transfers. | Working out processes cooperatively, even in heterogeneous groups, planing and designing, guiding others by profound learning and counselling support. Structuring interdisciplinary complex issues, goal-oriented and representing customer based. Taking interests and needs of customers into account. | Reflecting and assessing own and third-party sets of learning and working objectives, working self-directedly and responsibly, considering consequences for the working processes within the team. |

5. Quality Criteria for Vocational Training and Professional Development Programmes

be members who offer Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education commit themselves to complying with the following criteria:

Beyond the terms of a curriculum, the following content must be defined, put in writing and made available to persons interested or participating in the respective programmes:

- services and costs
- prerequisites for participation
- principles and goals of the respective programme
- content
- structure und organisation
- examination regulations
- examination, assessment and degree.

The prerequisites for participation are a qualification or degree in education or psychology. Persons who do not have the qualification mentioned above can take part in Vocational Training and Professional Development programmes that award a BQ qualification. The participant must be at least 18 years old when beginning the vocational or further training course; however, it is recommended that the participant be at least 21 years of age.

The provider must make sure that the team of educators has the following qualifications: a qualification in education or a related field, or a degree in the same field with at least 2 years of practical experience. Instructors without such official training or study can only work with groups, if they certify practical experience of at least five years in education, including two years in an adventure-based context.

At least 50% of the training offered needs to be performed by instructors who fulfil the qualifications described.

All instructors have extensive specialized theory and practical knowledge in the field of their teaching. They have a very broad spectrum of specialized cognitive and practical skills. They are also able to conduct learning contexts in their field in which unforeseen changes occur, they are able to develop their own performance, the performance of their participants and to assess. They must run courses, trainings or projects themselves regularly.

Regular revalidation of professional training as well as revalidation of qualifications and assessments in at least one outdoor activity is required.

Depending on the underlying educational concept, the framework conditions for such Vocational Training and Professional Development within *be* are as follows:

- at least 20 days in a period of min. three months to max. five years, which include theory, practice and an examination;
- theory and practice make up at least 18 days, which equals at least 150 teaching units, each of which is 45 minutes in length; two further days are needed for project work and assessment;
- in addition, these Vocational Training and Professional Development programmes must include a hands-on project that is carried out by the participant himself/herself and is at least eight hours long (plus preparation time and follow-up work);
- furthermore, participants must complete a relevant internship/hospitality that last several days;
- the programme ends in an examination, in which the acquired knowledge and skills are tested, and which lasts at least half a day;
- acceptable authorised leave (i.e. with a reasonable explanation) must not make up more than 10% of the entire vocational or further training period.

Every vocational or further training programme in Outdoor & Experiential Education within *be* ends with an examination. Participants must present a first-aid certificate (16 teaching units) or a higher first-aid qualification before the end of the vocational or further training programme in order to be admitted to the examination.

The examination consists of a theory and a practice part, and can either be passed or not passed. The qualitative examination regulations are based on at least Level 4 of the “German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning” (EQF). The examination can also possibly include the following: a written examination or case work, a hands-on project or a demonstration lesson, and oral examination or an oral presentation. The educators of the vocational or further training course are required to make notes or take minutes on each part of the examination, so that this documentation is available in case of a dispute. A final discussion should take place to review the vocational or further training programme and to give personal and professional advice.

At the end of their respective programmes, *be* members who offer Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education award their participants the “Experiential Educator” certificate. However, due to the fact that the prerequisites for participation may differ between courses, it is necessary to make the following distinction:

Participants who already had a qualification or relevant degree in education or psychology before the start of the vocational or further training programme will – upon successfully completing the course and passing the examination – be awarded the certificate with the title “Experiential Educator”.

All other participants will be awarded a certificate with the qualification title “BQ”, which stands for Basic Qualification. If the participant earns a qualification or a relevant degree in education or psychology within three years or verifiably gains at least three years of practice in the field of education after completing the vocational or further training programme in Outdoor & Experiential Education, then he/she can present the necessary proof to their educator, who will then issue a new certificate without the limiting title.

6. Main Content of Vocational Training and Professional Development Programmes

The following list of main content for Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education is based on the “European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning” (EQF) outlined earlier, or on the subdivision into the categories “Knowledge”, “Skills” and “Competences” described therein.

be members who offer vocational or further training courses must include at least the following content in their respective programmes, specify each part of the content, incorporate it into a curriculum and teach it using both theory and practice.

Knowledge: theoretical and/or factual knowledge of at least the following areas:

- historical background of Outdoor & Experiential Education
- goals and fundamental principles of Outdoor & Experiential Education
- different theories on learning
- models of communication
- target group orientation
- group processes and dynamics
- evaluation and quality assurance
- ecology and environmental protection
- knowledge of relevant legal and insurance-related basics
- risk-, safety-, emergency- and crisis management

Skills: cognitive and practical skills in at least the following areas:

- shaping learning processes
- conflict management
- clarifying each person’s role, e.g. between client and participant
- methods of moderation, conversation techniques, presentation, reflection and transfer
- content related to sports instruction (insofar as this content is part of the programme, it must at least be subject to the standards set up by the relevant sports instruction associations)
- first aid certificate (16 hours à 45 min., revalidation after 24 months necessary)

Competences: describing responsibility and autonomy:

- planning-, counselling and management competence
- target group-, process- and goal-oriented work in Outdoor & Experiential Education

Verification / Declaration of Commitment

As a *be* member, we _____ hereby commit ourselves to carrying out our work according to the quality principles of Vocational Training and Professional Development in Outdoor & Experiential Education.

We agree to having inspections carried out in order to verify our compliance with the quality principles. These inspections, which we will actively help design, are based on the quality assurance systems and tools developed by *be* in cooperation with its members.

The quality principles apply to all of the provider's activities in his relationships with clients, associations and the general public. These principles are binding for all freelance and permanent staff, educators and programme directors.

City / Date

Seal / Signature

7. Appendix

7.1

Source: <http://www.forumwerteorientierung.de/504941957714ea522/index.html#art1>, Article 1 Declaration on the Image of Humanity

“When carrying out their profession, the educators base their actions on the image of humanity that is rooted in the value system of human rights.

That means:

- 1.1 The educators commit themselves to protecting human dignity as established by the German *Grundgesetz* [constitution]. According to the *Grundgesetz*, every human being has an inviolable dignity and inalienable rights of his/her own, regardless of their personal abilities.
- 1.2 The educators perceive the human being to be an existing lifeform that lives in social relationships and is dependent on them for shaping his/her own life.
- 1.3 Every human being has a distinctive personality and is sociobiographically unique, and therefore every human being is accepted and taken seriously. This includes the right to mature self-determination and the opportunity to exercise this right at any time; the rights of others remain unaffected.
- 1.4 The educators support the participants in exercising their self-responsibility, yet they are aware of the tension between the participants' self-responsibility and the educator's duty to protect.
- 1.5 Every human being is worth the support in fostering his/her potential.
- 1.6 The educator perceives the human being to be a holistic being that integrates body, mind and soul, and adjust their training methods accordingly.”

7.2

Content of the certificate:

- training provider
- name of training programme (“Experiential Educator BQ” or “Experiential Educator”)
- duration of training programme
- content of training programme
- duration, topic and title of hands-on project
- duration of internship (if requested)