

# **GENDER AND QUALIFICATION**

## **- GENDERQUAL -**

TRANSCENDING GENDERED FEATURES OF KEY  
QUALIFICATIONS FOR IMPROVING OPTIONS FOR  
CAREER CHOICE AND ENHANCING HUMAN  
RESOURCE POTENTIAL

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**State of the art report July 2001**

## 1. Summary

The project will investigate the impact of gender segregation of European labour markets on vocational education and training (VET), with special regard to key (core) competencies / qualifications / skills / knowledge. Established gender barriers prove to be inadequate for a modernisation of work processes and, consequently, tend to lose validity because they will impede both individual career options of women and men as well as human resource development. Therefore, vocational education and training (VET) systems should aim at competencies corresponding to these challenges and at equals opportunities for both sexes.

The project will particularly investigate to which extend women and men tend to develop gender specific key qualifications or dispose of different sets of key competencies / qualifications in situations of occupational change. This should lead for both sexes to strategies of qualification allowing to overcome inequalities in the labour market on the one hand and to improve employability on the other. The aim envisaged is to reduce gender segregation in the labour market and to prepare for situations of occupational changes. As a conclusion, recommendations for policy makers and practitioners in vocational education and training and continuous vocational training will be defined according to this aim.

## 2. Research

The project work includes **literature research** and **empirical research**.

In view of the empirical part occupations had to be found, which can be investigated. For the occupations those with lower vocational education and training degrees should be taken into consideration. They should also include a female dominated occupation, a male dominated occupation and a mixed one. A further selection criterion was the comparability in the different countries in view of the same gendered features and in view of the vocational education and training. The chosen occupational fields are **nursery nurses** as a woman dominated occupation, **electricians** as a “male” occupation and **waiters/waitresses** as a gender mixed occupation. In the course of further research it turned out that the occupational fields were well chosen.

### 2.1. Literature research

Secondary analysis of national and international literature concerning

1. gendered structures of respective national VET systems and labour markets
  - VET related gender studies
  - including historical, cultural and economic preconditions
  - and especially regarding the state of research on career orientation and gender
2. state of the art of the national discourses of key qualifications
3. synthesis, elaborating commonalities and structural differences of the participants were done.

It turned out that there are indeed similarities concerning gender segregation and VET in the three occupational fields as considered in the planning phase of the project. Differences could be found concerning the historical, cultural and economic preconditions (e. g. special situation in Finland of becoming an independent state) and concerning the national discourses of key qualifications (e. g. a very intensive discussion in Great Britain since 1990 in contrast to a beginning discussion in Greece and Portugal).

With regard to key qualifications the crucial challenge is the diversity of understandings and

definitions of these “phenomena” in each country and in addition between the participating countries.

Furthermore it was attempted to analyse VET concepts with regard to key competencies and especially with respect to gender issues. It could be found that the theoretical background of these issues is very different in the participating countries. Of course this must be seen in connection with the different state of arts concerning the general key qualification debate. As a meaningful example for a publication about (key-)competencies and gender the report number 333 of the British “Institute for Employment Studies” (IES), (1997) "Skills, Competencies and Gender: Issues for pay and training" shall be mentioned. This report contains results which are comparable with results and discussions in other countries. The IES report highlights and expresses areas of research that are of interest for the GENDERQUAL project. Although this report is entitled "Skills, Competencies and Gender" it does not look into the interrelation of gender issues and competencies or skills. But the report states that there "is a paucity of research which addresses specific gender issues in defining competencies" (p.14).

This offers a big chance for the project, namely to combine existing national discussions of gender segregation and more or less intensive discussions about key qualifications and to elaborate new ideas for improving options for career choice and enhancing human resource potential.

For a short insight into the state of art in the U.K. – and in other countries as well - some interesting findings of the report shall be summarised (cf. Hoffmann, Bettina (2000): First national report).

There is a lot of research and work in the area of gender differences in management. Gregory (1990) has evaluated the research evidence and his conclusions are:

- Women have lower self-confidence, lower need for achievement and lower dominance.
- Research on gender differences in managerial work indicates that women and men do not differ greatly in the competencies they possess. Between females and males are no differences in their motivation to manage, "but women managing in a mostly male environment (i.e. in an organisation with only six per cent of female managers) showed a lower motivation to manage and lower self-esteem than male managers" (p.14).
- Several studies (Alimo-Metcalf, 1995) compare males and females in their exercise of leadership and have found between them few differences. Associated with leadership (criteria) women and men perceive different behaviours and qualities. Different attributes emerged. Women are furthermore rated lower on leadership abilities (an anticipated competence of managers). 'Transformational leadership style' of women (which involves the motivation of others in order to achieve a goal) is compared to the 'transactional leadership style' of men (meaning demonstrating formal authority and giving directions).
- Studies have found "that women managers, compared to men managers, have to tread a thin line between not being too masculine or too feminine" (p.14).

Interesting for the GENDERQUAL project is to follow these statements and to transfer them to the skilled trades or similar occupations.

For example to investigate what does 'too masculine' and 'too feminine' mean? How can these statements be understood? What do these features mean to personal or occupational identity?

And in a further step: what do these gender features mean to the development and performance of (key-)competencies?

But the IES report (1997) also concludes that the research "suggests that we should not expect any significant differences in the competencies possessed by both men and women " (p.14).

And that it is more likely according to Cahoon (1991) for gender differences to result from "sex stereotypes than from real differences in individual performance" (p.14).

These statements need to be investigated in further research. They very much depend on the understanding of competencies and inclusion of e.g. attitudes and values as competencies as this project does.

Another interesting point in these statements is the issue of perception. A new perspective on these findings and stated in the IES report (1995) could investigate that, although the same competency framework is used for women and men managers, the interpretation of competencies is likely to be different in practice. This thought then trickles down all levels and a general assumption could be that on all levels and in all occupations the same circumstances occur. A common competency framework exists, but the interpretation of it depends on whoever is using it, what view (male or female) is used. This might have implications for the qualification process of competencies.

The research findings of the IES report (1997) state that women tend to undervalue the skill levels of their jobs, especially when they work part-time. Men do not tend to do so. Matthews (1994) study indicated that lower levels of self-esteem can be found amongst women. This phenomenon may be related to lower perceptions of own-job competence.

The IES report (1997) also points out a relationship of the competence framework and gender issues. It furthermore asks 'Are women and men assessed for the same set of competencies?' One possible implication of these findings could be that the NVQ system in the UK with its competence based performance criteria discriminates against those individuals with a lower self-esteem as they rate their job-competence less. The current competence framework may disadvantage women.

Some questions raised in the IES report (1997) point in the same direction as the 'Genderqual' project:

- Ø Are there gender differences in the type of competencies demonstrated by men and women?
- Ø Are different competencies applied to men and women in the same job?
- Ø Or are different competencies applied to men's and women's jobs?

Once again here is a confirmation of our project.

The IES report (1997) suggests that further research into the gender implications and the use of skills and competencies will have to distinguish between the various different meanings and definitions and how these may vary within and between organisations.

## 2.2. Empirical research

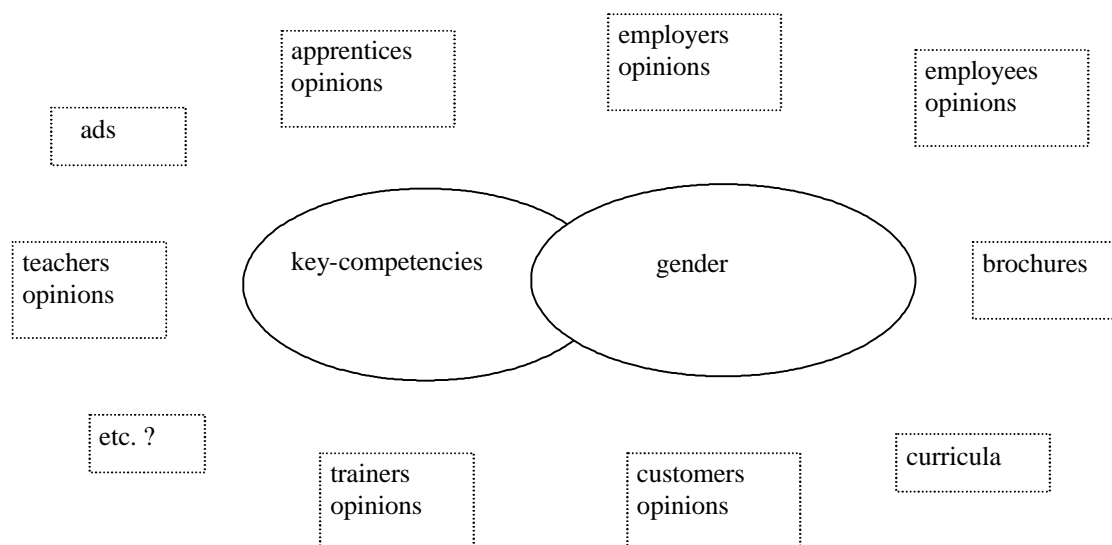
Current VET practices and their relation to gender segregation and gendered key competencies were analysed. To determine sets of the related key qualifications we

- did statistical research on the development of gendered structures in career choice and labour market,
- observed VET classes in vocational schools,

- observed working places,
- took interviews with apprentices, teachers, employers, employees etc. (cf. picture 1) and
- analysed curricula, ads, brochures.

Picture 1 shows the broad view on the cases.

**Pic. 1: Broad view on cases**



### Summary of first outcomes

Till now each partner worked out descriptions of their case studies and first analyses and interpretations of the first outcomes in view of key competencies and gender. Due to the historical and cultural backgrounds of the occupations in the participating countries and the current state of data collection the reports either lay more emphasis on (key) competencies and the relation between “key competencies” and gender (U.K., FIN, GER) or on a broader view of the cases and chances of VET (FIN, PT, GR).

The following sections will give a short overview of the reports.

The British partners mainly tried to relate competencies or skills which they extracted in their research to gender issues. While at college or work sites gender is “ignored” in general (tutors and trainers regard gender to be irrelevant to their work and assume at the same time that the same gender understanding is present) students show awareness of their gender identity. Statements of interviewees can quite be structured in female and male categories. But gendered features of key competencies cannot be identified by merely looking at one layer of statements. To grasp the core of the relation between gender and qualification it is necessary to look at many layers of statements, behaviour etc. Rather than perceiving gender as an individual characteristic, it must be seen as an outcome of social situations and arrangements. Gender is deeply inscribed into the daily routines and thinking (cf. doing gender).

The British partners also stated, that our project and its aim are not only about gender or individual differences but more about gender inequalities which still exist and need to be changed.

The Finnish partners stressed the importance to use a holistic view on the cases.

Competencies and skills depend on the socio-structural system. Because of that we should take vertical and horizontal structures of branches, occupations and worksites into account

while discussing (key) competencies and gender. This important aspect can be seen with the example, that interviewees talk about their special area of working site or working life. This reduced view effects different results concerning competencies, skills and gender. Furthermore the Finnish understanding of core competencies and skills was discussed. The Finnish partners stressed the importance of distinguishing between their constitution in working life, in vocational education and by the individual. In presenting their cases the Finnish partners wished to stress the “objective competence areas and skills areas” rising from the occupational work, which are comprehensible in the wider context of competencies and skills at this work site, division of work and structure of industry in this branch. The worker’s competencies and skills are an outcome of occupational growth process, and become the ones in “use”, when negotiated with the “objective ones” (cf. P.-E. Ellström). The Finnish partners proposed the word cross-occupational competencies and skills referring to what is searched for in the Genderqual-context.

The German partners mainly discussed demanded competencies which were found in ads and interviews. These competencies were tried to be structured in four categories: more appearance competencies (or presentation competencies), more (inner) personal competencies, more social competencies and more cognitive competencies. After that the competence areas in between each occupation and between the occupations were compared. It was found that in all cases (inner) personal competencies were highly valued: independence, flexibility, motivation, ... As a preliminary result it has revealed that social competencies are highly valued with electricians and waiters/waitresses as customer orientated professions and of course with nursery nurses. With waiters/waitresses presentation competencies (well-groomed appearance etc.) and cognitive competencies are specially valued with. Further differences will have to be detected.

Another attempt of structuring the competencies was to differentiate between multi-functional competencies and occupation specific competencies.

The Portuguese partners laid emphasis on chances of VET for transcending gender barriers. Firstly they presented outcomes concerning trainees motivation, requirements and main duties of each occupation. Because of a clear gendered structure of labour market and VET situation in Portugal they tried to approach sources of gendered features by interviews and discussed different types of VET institutions and their methods in view of transcending gender barriers. Information and discussions about realisation of equality of opportunities which is given by law should be promoted throughout the country, supported by professional training centres, trade unions, schools, municipalities, media, companies etc. It was possible to survey some of the needs namely the role of professional training as a way of sensitising the youngsters to the inexistence of distinct professional roles between men and women. Professional training doesn’t only aim at investing and qualifying people but it aims also at creating new opportunities of employment, that is aware of a pro-active perspective of professional training which includes, among other perspectives, the creation of self-employment.

The Greek partners presented data about the skills and competencies required for nursery nurses, electricians and waiters from interviews with students, employers and customers, observations in training centres and workplaces, classified ads and documentary sources. A number of social skills, occupational competencies and personality characteristics as well as other characteristics were outlined for each profession. Even though a clear gender segregation exists in Greece, especially in occupations that do not require university education, most interviewees stressed that the skills and competencies required for the above mentioned professions are not necessarily gender specific. This finding led the Greek partners to the discussion of the importance of other factors determining gender segregation. These factors are broader sociological factors, and are quite apparent during the occupational selection process of young people. Occupational selection in Greece is rather an educational

selection process, which is affected by the educational and occupational background of the parents, the level of education required for each profession and other factors. The examination of the interplay of these factors will present useful information for the understanding of the gendered features of key qualifications.

### **3. Prospect**

In the next working steps more data will be collected and analyses and interpretation especially in view of exceptional cases – these are women in male dominated occupations and men in women dominated occupations – as well as occupational changers will be continued and extended.

In the end of the project recommendations for policy makers and VET practitioners with regard to competence orientation for transcending gendered career choice will be concluded.