

CASE STUDY¹

Assessment training certificate for examination board members in work-based learning (LAP Certificate)

Exemplar: Austria

VET Pathway: Dual vocational education/apprenticeship qualification (mainly work-based based),
EQF level 4

Overview

In order to obtain an apprenticeship qualification, every apprentice has to pass a LAP exam² in their respective occupation, after having completed apprenticeship training. This LAP exam is taken in front of a board of examiners. Members of the board, i.e. 'LAP-examiners' should have didactical/instructional and pedagogical competences. Certified trainings for LAP-examiners were thus introduced to successfully prepare new LAP examiners for their assessment activities. The LAP certificate is a voluntary certification for examiners in final apprenticeship examinations, which is offered by the institutes for further training of the Austrian social partners with full funding of the course fee available. It consists of 5 modules, each of a duration of 8 x 50 minutes, in which legal and didactical issues are covered. A handbook for successfully carrying out final apprenticeship examinations was also issued by *Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft (ibw)*³ ('Erfolgreich Prüfen: Handbuch für das zertifizierte LAP-Training für Prüfer/innen'), and is handed to all participants of the LAP Certificate training.

Context and background

Dual vocational education and training (dual VET, also termed apprenticeship training) is a nationwide regulated, formal training pathway at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3B, EQF level 4) which imparts a full qualification for a specific occupation. Currently, there are around 200 apprenticeships. As suggested by the term "dual", apprenticeship training takes place at two places of learning: in a training company and at an occupation-specific part-time vocational school (time ratio 80:20). The apprentice is in a contractually regulated training relationship with his/her training company and is a student at a part-time vocational school at the same time. For every apprenticeship occupation, a binding training regulation is issued which contains the specific competence profile (a profile of learning outcomes) and the job profile (an in-company curriculum).

Description: Final Apprenticeship Examination (LAP)

The LAP exam is the final summative assessment of dual vocational education. It takes place at the end of the apprenticeship: it is the final apprenticeship (or apprenticeship-leaving) examination. It consists of a written and a practical examination, such as work simulation, project work or a case study, and an oral examination afterwards – referring to the practical work.

¹ Sources:

Curriculum LAP-certificate: http://qualitaet-lehre.at/images/downloads/Infoblatt_Curriculum_Zertifiziertes_LAP_Training.pdf;
Training providers: <http://www.wifisalzberg.at/default.aspx/lap-zertifizierung/@/menuid/1491/>; Handbook 'assessing successfully':
http://www.ibw.at/components/com_redshop/assets/document/product/1417697676_handbuch_erfolgreich_pruefen.pdf.

² LAP: abbreviation for 'Lehrabschlussprüfung' or 'Final Apprenticeship Examination'.

³ Ibw: Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft; Institute for research and development in VET.

This exam is organized by the apprenticeship clearing offices and taken before an examination committee, or 'board of examiners'. This ensures that the training and its validation are separated, which makes an essential contribution to objectivity and therefore quality assurance.

The clearing office for the final apprenticeship exam ensures quality assurance throughout Austria for the examination tasks which the candidates need to carry out in the exam. The clearing office is set up in the Ministry of Economy and supervised by ibw. Its tasks include: safeguarding a uniform quality standard by checking the exam tasks, assessment guidelines and sample answers to see if they comply with the respective examination regulation, subject-specific accuracy, practical relevance, and corresponding quality of instruction. The clearing office is also responsible for the training of LAP-examiners.

The exam aims to determine if the apprentice has acquired the skills and knowledge required for the apprenticeship occupation and is able to work in the trained occupation as a 'skilled worker'.

There are legal criteria for boards of examiners for the final apprenticeship examinations: the apprenticeship clearing office has to establish boards of examiners for the final apprenticeship examinations. Each board must consist of a chair and two observers. The members of the board must have the professional qualification of at least the same level, and in the same or related occupational field as the examination to be taken.

The chairs of the boards of examiners are appointed by the head of the apprenticeship office on the basis of a suggestion by the regional vocational council (Berufsausbildungsbeirat) for a duration of 5 years. The head of the office is bound to unanimous suggestions. If within two months after demanding a suggestion, none is made, head of the office has to appoint a chair after hearing the Chamber of Labour and the regional Economic Chamber.

The observers of an examination board are to be nominated for each examination date. One examiner has to be nominated according to an examiner nomination list issued by the regional Chambers of Labour, the other according to an examiner nomination list issued by the respective departments of the regional Economic Chambers, each list being valid for 5 years. If possible, the observers should have didactical/instructional and pedagogical competences. These can be proven e.g. by having obtained a certificate for apprenticeship examination trainers (LAP-certificate).

Members of the boards of examination work on a voluntary basis. Thus, there are also 'soft' prerequisites for examiners described in the LAP handbook:

- care for young people and have an understanding of their behaviour;
- open to people of different backgrounds (youth, older people taking the exam as their second learning pathway);
- have expert knowledge in the field of examination;
- ready to invest in the preparation of exams and to communicate with colleagues;
- able to give practice-oriented tasks;
- be a good listener;
- support candidates in the presentation of their competences;
- recognise the signs of 'exam nerves' and methods to counteract them;
- willing to reflect and challenge their own examination behaviour.

As a means of quality assurance of the LAP examination, new LAP-examiners are encouraged to become certified in 'certified LAP-trainings for LAP examiners'. Although exact numbers are not available, the exam is reported to be popular among examiners and enjoys substantial take-up.

Examiner Training

Training courses for LAP-examiners were introduced to successfully prepare new LAP-examiners for their assessment activities. Experienced examiners should furthermore get the opportunity to reflect on their role as assessor and their behaviour during assessment as well as exchange experience among peers. A curriculum for nationwide minimum standards in LAP trainings for examiners was published. The institutes for further training of the Austrian social partners offer the training for the LAP-certificate. Funding for the course fees is available: LAP examiners are eligible to 100 % funding. The training is very popular among examiners, but exact numbers are not available.

Further training is offered in the form of a 'Training course for certified LAP examiners'. The training programme consists of 4 additional modules, most of a duration of 8 x 50 minutes. In-company trainers for apprentices are eligible to a 75 % funding of modules 2-4, which are more generally targeting topics of communication and assessment.

The target groups are current and potential LAP examiners, interested in-company trainers and also already certified LAP-examiners who want to further or maintain their knowledge. All new LAP-examiners are encouraged to watch at least one LAP examination before enrolling in the training.

Module 1: Certified LAP-Training for examiners

Target group: LAP-examiners (new as well as experienced)

Duration: 1 day (8 x 50 minutes)

Content:

- Legal Background:
 - o Legal provisions
 - o VET law
 - o general examination regulations
- Examination content
 - o Occupation-specific examination regulations
- Didactic-psychological topics
 - o Understanding of roles and the attitude of the examiner, reflexion of own assessment behaviour
 - o Structure of a successful examination
 - o 'Assessing correctly'
 - o Simulation of examination situations
 - o Assessment of performance and mistakes in assessment
 - o Adequate handling of 'examination fear', nervousness and challenging examination situations
 - o Giving feedback correctly

Teaching methods:

- Impulse statements including practical examples, if possible especially targeted towards the occupations relevant to the participants
- Moderated exchange of experience by the examiners
- Practical exercises and role plays to support reflection of behaviour, leaving time for adequate feedback and analysis of exercises
- Maximum of 20 participants

Upon completion of the first module, which fulfils the minimum criteria issued by the clearing office, the 'LAP-Certificate' is handed out to all successful participants. Training providers are free to offer additional content,

such as the Economic Chamber's institute for further training with their 'training course for certified LAP-examiners', which consists of an additional 4 modules:

- Module 2: 'The perfect examination setting'
- Module 3: 'The art of conversation' and dealing with challenging situations during the LAP
- Module 4: Fair assessment and feedback
- Module 5: Principles of the VET law for LAP examiners

The LAP-certificate training focuses on communication strategies and reflection of their own behaviour. Its goal is to show examiners/assessors how to direct their own behaviour in order to create a fair and relaxed examination setting.

Further professional development

The successfully completed modules of the training course offered by WIFI are officially recognised by the 'Trainer Academy' (Ausbilderakademie der Volkswirtschaftlichen Gesellschaft) for their training towards the 'qualified apprentice trainer' and the 'apprentice trainer diploma' qualifications.

Impact / Effectiveness:

The best practices found in this case study can be summarised as follows:

- Separation of assessment from learning/training
- Standardised examinations across Austria
- Training of examiners in the skills of assessment
- Separation of quality assurance from assessment
- Involvement of industry through regional economic chambers giving business faith in the work ready skills of graduates

Further Development

The training will stay voluntary, as it is difficult to find examiners, who take up this job voluntarily, and would adversely affect the number of examiners available.