

Austria – Medizinische Universität Wien

Institution	Medizinische Universität Wien
Study programs	Human- und Zahnmedizin (Dentistry)
Skills in German language	German language skills are necessary.
Study fees	-
Interviewed Person	Student
Interviewer	IG - DUK

T2.2 – Identification of good practices.

Case: Validation of Dentistry-Degree in Austria

I – General Information, Summary

X is male, Syrian, 26 years old and has been in Austria for three years. He finished his degree in dentistry in Syria and worked one year as a dentist in Syria. He came to Austria to study a further-education master at DPU, which doesn't require a dentistry degree from Austria. He also wanted to work as a dentist in Austria afterwards and that's why he underwent the "Nostrifikation"-procedure, which is a validation procedure for formal prior learning. An Austrian degree in dentistry is necessary for being a dentist in Austria, therefore his qualification from Syria must be proven to be equivalent to the Austrian degree. "Nostrifikation" checks the documents and contains an exam called "Stichprobenprüfung" to check if the candidate has the required theoretical knowledge. If parts of the exam are failed, candidates must retake classes. Furthermore, without influence of the results of the exam, X had to take certain classes anyway, to write a thesis ("Diplomarbeit") and pass "Staatsexamen" (like a state-exam for receiving the degree and the permit to be allowed to work as a dentist)

II - Awareness

How did you become aware of your personal skills and competences and how they might be used in your new country?

He was aware of his personal capacities, when he arrived in Austria in 2014. He did not know how to use them to integrate in Austria and he had to ask around to find out what he needs to do in order to be allowed to work as a dentist in Austria. He got guidance in Austria – most useful were his friends. People from official services didn't help him much, mostly because they couldn't give advice in English language, but also because the advice given wasn't useful or even harmful regarding his success at the assessment procedure. His friends and peer were a great help to him, but also general advice by the university was important, even though the university staff wasn't trained to give proper advice in English language and they were not always as supportive as they could have been..

III - Starting up

How did you learn about the opportunities to get recognition of your skills and competences?

He wasn't offered any form of validation for his dentistry certificate. He first looked for counsel online, but the online providers for advice he found couldn't help him regarding dentistry. They only had information for studying medicine. They told him to contact the chamber of dentists. The chamber of dentists advised him to get in touch with the University of Vienna. He assumed that he got this advice, because the advisors at the chamber of dentists couldn't give him any advice in English language and his German wasn't good enough at that time. At the University of Vienna he learnt that he had to go through "Nostrifikation"-procedure, a validation procedure for formal prior learning. First, he had to submit his certificate for his dentistry degree. As a next step, his theoretical knowledge was tested in the assessment procedure of "Nostrifikation", but not his practical skills. He thinks that the Austrian validation procedure for formal prior learning ("Nostrifikation") needs to be changed for dentistry. He did not trust the form of testing as he thinks it is not suitable to evaluate

the dentist's profession. The testing was conducted in a respectful way, but the assessment was rather a standard exam, given to everyone who goes through "Nostrifikation" in dentistry and not focused on personal strengths or practical experience. He understands it as a bureaucratic obstacle. The procedure was very difficult and frustrating for him, but he heard that there is a lack of dentists in Austria, which motivated him to go through the validation procedure anyway.

IV – Documentation and support

How easy/difficult was it to get together evidence of your learning? What help did you get?

X collected all his formal certificates and recommendation letters back in Syria, because he knew he would need them. He also had them stamped by the Syrian embassy, which is a must for "Nostrifikation". He told me that many Syrian students have problems getting the stamp. They just have their certificates about academic degrees, but not the necessary stamp by the embassy. The focus of his documentation was therefore formal and he didn't create a portfolio, as he sees it rather important for job interviews, not for admission to university or validation of his university degree in dentistry. He didn't ask his friends or family to check on his formal documentation and furthermore he also didn't do any self-assessment before the actual assessment during the validation procedure. The university staff wasn't very supportive regarding the preparation for the validation assessment or "Stichprobenprüfung" as it is called in Austria. They told him that the exam will last about 6 hours and which general topics will be asked. They also told him to bring food and water for the breaks and that he doesn't need to prepare or learn for the exam. His friends knew about his exam and advised him to study all the dentistry lectures/literature of the study program as a preparation, which he did. And it turned out to be the right choice. X pointed out that the university staff might be better trained nowadays in advising migrants for "Nostrifikation" than in 2015, when his validation procedure took place.

V - Assessment

What was your experience of the actual assessment? What made it a good - or not so good - experience?

He prepared for the exam "Strichprobenprüfung" by going through the study programs' lectures and literature. The assessment was not about getting grip on his personal capacities, just on checking if his theoretical knowledge matched the curriculum. He was informed that the assessment would take about 6 hours and that multiple-choice questions would be asked. It was a paper-based standard-exam. The university staff was neutral, neither supportive nor an obstacle. The language of the assessment was German. He was only told the general subjects of the assessment, but not which lectures or literature he should learn. Furthermore, he didn't have access to the university lectures and literature as he didn't have a student's ID number. So he had to ask random students at the university to share their literature with him to prepare for the test. When he could, he tried to prepare in a different way and learn more for the general medical subjects rather than dentistry, as he had more background in dentistry subjects from his education in Syria and from DPU Krems, where he did his further-education master's degree. The general medical subjects were rather basic and not too connected with dentistry, which made him pass 7 out of 10 part exams (the "Sichprobenprüfung" exam for validation for dentistry consists of 10 part exams).

VI – Impact

What happened afterwards – where did it take you? – good or not so good results?

X passed 7 out of 10 parts of “Stichprobenprüfung”-exam for validation. He failed the general medical parts, which are not so much connected to dentistry. This is why he had to retake classes in order to learn these topics. Nevertheless, without connection to the results of the exam he had to take classes in statistics, radiology and other subjects.- He was disappointed that they didn’t cover these subjects in the exam already, but make it compulsory to take these classes. He was accepted as a student at Universität Wien and passed all the exams. He still must write a thesis (“Diplomarbeit”) and he has to undertake the state exam (“Staatsexamen”) to get the degree and the permit to be a dentist in Austria. The result of the “Stichprobenprüfung” and the check of the formal documents didn’t have any influence in terms of qualification, voluntary job or paid work. His friends gave him guidance regarding the next steps to become a dentist in Austria. Regarding “Stichprobenprüfung” he didn’t get any report as he wasn’t an official student at that time. He finds some lectures he had to take and topics he had to learn not useful for his professional development as they had no or only little connection to dentistry. He had the chance to report the assessment, if he thought it was unfair for him, but his friends recommended him not to do so, as it wouldn’t have helped and would have only caused trouble.

VII - Impact on the longer term**Now that you had a lot of time to reflect on your validation-process, what was the impact on the longer term for you?**

While doing the exams he was working at DPU (German Private Dentistry University) in Krems as an assistant at the dentistry lab for two years. He also finished his further-education master there. He stopped working there to concentrate at finishing his degree in dentistry at the University of Vienna. At the moment he is looking for supervision of his thesis, which is very difficult as he got rejected by many Professors. He told that nobody helps or advises him where to start with the thesis. He doesn’t feel like he needs what he learned in the compulsory lectures and the general medical lectures he had to do, because he failed the exam. After the exam, he knew more clearly which theoretical subjects he had to learn to fit the curriculum and receive his degree. At the same time he found many of the subjects he had to learn not helpful for his professional development. The exam didn’t evaluate his practical skills and competences as dentist. The exams caused a lot of stress for him.