

# The BQ-Portal – the information portal for foreign professional qualifications



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**Organisation:** Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

**Country:** Germany

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** Economic affairs

**Type:** Data, Organisational Design, Partnerships, Public Service

**Launched in:** 2011

**Overall development time:** 5 year(s) 10 month(s)

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# Description

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The BQ-Portal is the first online work and knowledge-sharing platform in Europe to pool all of the relevant information on foreign professional qualifications and vocational education and training systems. The aim is to assist both the competent bodies, responsible for the recognition process, and employers in assessing foreign professional qualifications. The focus is made on non-academic qualifications. It is being implemented by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research (IW) and Jinit[ on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. The BQ-Portal was recognised as the best and most innovative performer in public administrations across Europe in 2015 and received the European Public Sector Award (EPSA) from the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA).

The online platform provides detailed and quality assured information regarding foreign vocational education and training systems, the substance and duration of individual vocational training programmes, and the legal basis on which they are offered.

Before 2011 the competent bodies, responsible for the recognition process, and employers only had isolated pieces of inadequate and incomplete information regarding foreign professional qualifications. The BQ-Portal was designed to change this.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Germany is currently experiencing a shortage of qualified professionals who completed vocational education and training.
  - The Recognition Act caused a significant increase in the overall number of applications and the number of countries of origin.
  - The assessment procedures (and ensuing outcomes) were inconsistent and lacking transparency, whilst also requiring a lot of manpower.
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## Objectives

Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality

- Assisting the competent bodies in the recognition process by offering the relevant information and providing a platform for exchanging practices
  - Contributing to consistency, transparency, efficiency, quality and acceleration of the recognition process and fostering transparency of foreign professional qualifications
  - Helping companies evaluate foreign professional qualifications and facilitating labour market integration of people with foreign professional qualifications
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## Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Other

- All competent bodies are given access to the same pool of information, which reduces the costs and time consumption.
- The employers gain a better and faster understanding of what a particular set of foreign professional qualifications actually entails.
- The detailed information provided by the BQ-Portal renders skilled workers who have obtained their qualifications outside Germany more attractive for employers.

# Results

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## Efficiency

- All competent bodies involved in the recognition process, all around Germany, are given access to the same pool of information.
  - This reduces the costs and time taken to assessing equivalence of qualifications, fosters consistency and transparency of the recognition procedures.
  - The (potential) employers gain a better and faster understanding of what a particular set of foreign professional qualifications actually entails.
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## Effectiveness

- Impressive number of 81 country profiles, which are the descriptions of vocational education and training systems;
  - More than 2600 professional profiles, which are the detailed information on individual vocational training programmes;
  - Over 375 members of the staff of the competent bodies are enrolled in the portal.
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## Service quality

### Accessibility:

- All internet users have an access to the public area of the BQ-Portal at [www.bq-portal.de](http://www.bq-portal.de): country and professional profiles.
- The employees of the competent bodies register in the BQ-Portal and acquire access to the restricted area of the portal.
- As registered users, they can create, change or comment the content of the portal, upload outcomes of the assessment procedures.

### Responsiveness:

- Active inclusion of all stakeholders into the development of the BQ-Portal: taking account of their individual needs and interests;
- Active inclusion of the end users in the processes of gathering and managing information based on a collaborative approach;
- Constant communication with the end users helps track possible errors and optimise the database.

### Reliability:

- Besides educational researchers, the staff of the competent bodies, i.e. the practitioners actually using the database, also create contents
- All content being added undergoes a multistage quality control process to ensure that it meets the predefined academic standards
- Compliance with the requirements regarding formal presentation and content is verified by a trained and designated “competent editor”.

### Other:

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## User satisfaction

- The competent bodies are mostly very satisfied with the services provided by the BQ-Portal
  - The information available in the portal makes it possible for equivalence procedures to be completed faster and more efficiently
  - The quality of the relevant procedures has converged at a higher level, the workload has been reduced.
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## Other improvements

- A multilingual team was formed able to conduct the research using different language skills.
- The BQ-Portal was recognised as the best and most innovative performer in public administrations across Europe in 2015 by EIPA.
- The BQ-Portal is the unique online work and knowledge-sharing platform in Europe on foreign professional qualifications.
- The BQ-Portal is a “learning system”. The competent bodies are responsible for expanding the portal and keeping it up-to date.

# Development

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## Design

The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy commissioned a feasibility study from the IW and IFOK GmbH to find out whether the competent bodies had adequate resources to deal with the increasing number of applications for recognition of foreign qualifications. The results showed that the knowledge management systems in place at 2011 were inadequate. Thus, it was decided to launch the BQ-Portal. The platform had to live up to the needs of the competent bodies and meet academic standards.

The BQ-Portal is designed to actively involve the competent bodies in the processes of gathering and managing information based on a collaborative approach. For this reason, the project consortium took a number of measures to ensure that the competent bodies would be able to independently search for relevant information and/or upload new information to the database, and that they would see the benefits of this. Six working committees from the staff of the competent bodies and a round table including 20 senior staff members from politics, economy, various associations and civil society discussed the structure of the database before programming began. The insights gained during these meetings were then used in the final designs of the database and the website.

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## Testing

- The development phase started in June 2011 and lasted until end of 2015. It included following stages:
  - September 2011: creating an information website including information on the legal situation, the procedures and methods used in the assessment of foreign qualifications and contacts.
  - March 2012: transforming the information website into an online work and knowledge-sharing platform by uploading country profiles, descriptions of vocational education and training systems, and professional profiles, detailed information on individual vocational training programmes, as well as practical guidelines, and inserting the search function.
  - January 2013: enhancing functions of the BQ-Portal by developing „My workbench“, forum and comments function, as well as creating an English version of the BQ-Portal.
  - June 2013: expanding range of content types available on the BQ-Portal by adding the fields “historical development” and “additional information” as well as uploading a new homepage video, slides and picture galleries.
  - October 2013: optimising operation by simplifying the input of the assessment outcomes and inserting the function of comparing different versions of the content types.
  - February 2014: introducing new functions like the automatic email notification when new content is published and plot a new world map overview for the country profiles.
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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- A round table and work committees including all stakeholders involved in the recognition process were formed before programming began.
- Three partners responsible for different aspects of the project were commissioned to implement the BQ-Portal.
- The Drupal CMS was used, which allows large amounts of information to be systematically gathered and processed.

### Resources used:

- The project is financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. Jinit[ AG develops the technical infrastructure.
  - The IW is responsible for preparing information about foreign vocational education and training systems as well as administrative support.
  - Staff processing the recognition cases in the competent bodies are responsible for expanding the database and keeping it up-to-date.
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## Diffusion

- According to the evaluation conducted in 2015 the BQ-Portal is well known among the relevant target groups.
  - The target groups are approached through press releases, presentations, information stands, e-newsletters, articles in journals and magazines.
  - The European Public Sector Award (EPSA) received in 2015 made the BQ-Portal better known at national, European and international level.
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## Challenges and solutions

- Involving all the stakeholders in the conceptual development of the portal: a large number of meetings in various configurations
  - Developing and maintaining the portal: the BQ-Portal is a “learning system” and is being kept up-to-date in a decentralised way
  - Quality assurance of information: all content undergoes a multistage quality control, final check is verified by a “competent editor”
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## Partnerships

## **BMW, IW, Jinit, IFOK, BIBB, ZDH, competent bodies**

Academics and Research Bodies, Civil Society, Other Public Sector, Private sector

BMW launched the BQ-Portal and commissioned the cooperating partners, IW, IFOK and Jinit, with the development and implementation of the project. At the beginning the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) also supported the portal. The IW finds, translates and prepares information about foreign vocational education and training systems and qualifications and provides the administrative support. Through seminars and one-to-one discussions, it gives guidance and tips for research, and thereby helps the competent bodies to process recognition cases and upload the results in the portal. Jinit implements the portal from a technical perspective. From 2011 to 2015, IFOK was responsible for the communication and public relations work. Since 2016, the IW took over this task. The competent bodies are steadily filling the portal with new contents. The conceptual and content development is being discussed with senior staff members from politics, economy, various associations and civil society.

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# **Lessons Learned**

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## **Lessons Learned**

- It should be clarified very early which information the target groups require and which information might be expendable.
  - The more intensive is the collaboration with all the stakeholders, the more practical is the portal for the target groups.
  - Being aware of a necessity of ongoing maintenance and optimisation of the platform.
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## **Conditions for success**

- The robustness of the technical digital infrastructure
  - The involvement of all stakeholders from the very beginning
  - The active contribution of the staff of the competent bodies who expands the BQ-Portal and keeps it up-to-date
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## **Other information**

Various stakeholders can receive mutual benefit from the information supplied in the system.

And at the same time they can provide information for a closed user group or for the public via a central online platform.

- This practice can be implemented in areas where many different organisations are involved simultaneously in the same working process.

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