

Information Sheet

European Partnership Leonardo da Vinci QualiProSecondHand

The QualiProSecondHand project is a two-year research project supported by the European Commission which aims at developing qualification approaches and possible ways for the professionalisation of the second hand industry. In the framework of this project, the first important results are ready to be presented. They are based on both, a scientific analysis of the sector as well as on several case studies.

At first, the second hand sector in the partner countries of the project such as Germany, Finland, Belgium, Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia and the UK seems to be quite heterogeneous. Nevertheless, numerous similarities were identified in the context of the sector's analysis. Thus, various parallels exist with regard to the employee structure, to the areas of business, to the clientele and to the development of certain trends. In addition to this the companies operating in the sector could be clearly divided into profit and not-for-profit organisations. And also, both the companies' structures within a type of business as well as the tasks and processes within the different areas of business are relatively similar. The second hand industry is an independent, growing sector whose professionalisation and quality can be increased by means of sector-specific qualifications. Therefore, it is amongst other things, necessary to improve its comparability with the first hand market and to create more transparency.

The quality of the second hand businesses is an important starting point for comparability. The introduction of quality standards contributes significantly to their professionalisation. The quality is reflected e.g. in the products that are sold, the service, the operating schedule, the way a business is presenting itself and its individual structures and processes. The key to an improved quality and professionalisation is the qualification of the employees. A general sector-specific need for qualifications was identified in the context of its analysis. From this follows the necessity to develop qualifications for the sector on a European level which take into account ongoing developments like the cross-border trade and ensure coherence and comparability in doing so. The project takes the following steps in order to contribute to achieving this goal:

- The creation of a scope for the development of qualification concepts which are based on defined quality standards.
- The creation of a guideline for the development of qualifications. This guideline could serve as and should be a helpful business tool.
- The creation of a network design. This is done against the background of the introduction of sector-specific qualifications especially to be able to involve the small companies. The establishment of networks for the purpose of exchanging experiences strengthens the companies' innovativeness and competitiveness.

A significant contribution to more professionalisation is made by means of the products described. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the development of both, common quality standards as well as quality approaches or concepts, respectively, will have a positive effect on the development of the second hand sector in Eastern Europe which is comparatively underdeveloped. The details of the results of the sector analysis are available at www.QualiProSH.eu in the form of an overall european report and in the form of individual national reports.

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The second hand sector in United Kingdom

The research revealed a large and varied market for second hand goods in the UK. There seems to be very little structure to the overall market; rather it is made up of the sale of a wide variety of products, basically forming part of the retail industry. As society has changed, particularly with respect to the environment and in new technology, there appears to be having been a growth in both the quality of second hand goods, and the size of the market. The continuous drive to get individuals to recycle and reuse to protect the planet has resulted in reluctance on the part of many people not to simply 'throw away'. Also the realisation that there is a considerable amount of wealth locked away in unwanted goods has motivated people to sell on unwanted items.

The organisation of the sale of goods within the market is also quite varied. The sellers within the market are individuals, many small and a few large businesses, and charities. Individuals sell their products through e-bay, car boot sales, classified advertisements and direct to second hand businesses. As such, they are usually not registered, formal organisations with little regulation of the market. Charities play a significant part of the second hand market in the UK. They sell a range of products, but mainly textiles, books, CD's and bric-a-brac, which are usually acquired through donations. Many of the workers in charities are volunteers, especially females over 60 years of age.

Much of the industry is non-federated, but there are some federations covering specific elements of the industry e.g. market traders, charities, booksellers etc. Some of these are fairly recent developments as an increasing amount of professionalisation comes into the industry.

Both initial research and further research through individual case studies indicated that formal training was not what was required. This was mainly because of the nature of the enterprises, type of workers involved and various organisational factors. Experience of staff was identified as being important for many roles within the organisations, but particularly sales. Any training that was needed should be flexible in nature, with a particular emphasis for on-the-job training.

Managers, employees and volunteers often required different kinds of training. The main elements of training required were in the fields of customer care; business and management; IT; retailing; health & safety; product knowledge; legislation; and first aid. For most of the retail workers it was referred to as 'softer people skills'.

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