

Role and contents of the portfolio concept

1. Role

Every young person on the threshold between school and vocational training goes through a process of developing greater awareness: Who am I, what do I want, what ought to be my first, independent steps to a job and rewarding career. Without support it is difficult to take these first steps. The amount of support required to cope successfully with the changeover to more independence varies from person to person.

The process to be dealt with on the threshold between school and profession does not necessarily begin at the end of the general school education, but begins during childhood, with the moulding of certain interests. This process is generally continued during a person's entire working life.

During a person's working life, decisions have to be made again and again, for which you have to become aware of your own interests, strong and weak points, skills and qualifications. Decisions have to be made for the future; you have to "sell" yourself. Career coaching is nowadays no longer an activity which only applies to elite circles. The developments in technology, in markets, in society today, in comparison to the past, make it much more necessary to sell yourself, and in doing so to ask the question again and again about medium and long-term prospects.

In some cases it is possible to do this independently and without the support of others. But even in this case guidelines are required, an orientation, in order to look back into the past, analyse the present situation and use this to develop new perspectives. A decision for further training, a decision for a new job or even a different kind of work is ultimately based on the same principles and information as the decision made at the point of transition to the first vocational training.

It is therefore useful to prepare an analysis and documentation portfolio in the context of this first work-related decision, which is continued during the future working life. This is not easy: The portfolio must be organized in such a way that it grows with the development of the "vocational character" and the experience. It should not be a burden to the young person and must still be able to give the experienced skilled worker and manager assistance and tips.

The portfolio needs to contain notes about which stages of training and development in which part of the working life have significance. This makes it possible to always keep the portfolio up-to-date and not to overload it, and at the same time it gives an outline of the previous training and further training measures, as well as of the qualification orientation.

The fact that there are no correct, perfect answers ought to be taken into consideration. The claim to perfection often contributes towards the inability to make decisions. The aim of self-exploration must be to give yourself the best possible answers, to reflect and then to show your strong points outwardly and to work on the weak points. Choosing the right job and developing a career is like school: A continual process of improvement, where however no marks are given at certain points, but where self satisfaction is the measure of all things.

Additionally: Within his/her profession each person should be fulfilled and not have to live up to the expectation of others.

2. Contents

2.1 The dream job

What is my dream job? What do I expect from my job?

An answer to this in the sense of - "don't need a job, need to win the lottery" does not lead us to our goal and only helps to a limited extent. Money may play a central role in the definition of the dream job, but is money the sole criteria?

In the course of a career you should assess where you are now in relation to your long terms goals so that you are able to redefine what your "dream job" is compared to the reality of the situation.

There is hardly anybody with a job, where at least small changes would not mean improvement in job satisfaction. For this reason the question of the dream job helps to formulate expectations and desires, which are decisive, since together with abilities and aptitudes, interests play the central role for choosing a profession.

If somebody finds it difficult to define the dream job, perhaps a roundabout way may help: Which job would be hell for me? What do I definitely don't want to do? If these statements are reversed, this might be helpful in describing the dream job.

2.2 Interests, abilities, characteristics

There are a variety of tests to determine interests, strong and weak points, skills and abilities. These tests can be used as a way of discovering one's own with appropriate guidance. The character in conjunction with skills and qualifications is a central starting point for the right profession. In addition to the formal qualifications, in particular hobbies and goals play a central role in formulating ideas about the profession, as well as in the choice of possible training professions, and in the subsequent presentation of those skills and abilities in the framework of an application.

Therefore, all abilities and characteristics, which give a complete picture of the person, should be documented in this section of the portfolio. This can be done with the tests mentioned above and shown here as an example. This can also be developed, with professional support, on a very sound basis. It can, however, also be done by writing your biography. For this purpose specific, targeted questions are also provided.

2.3 Documentation and utilising professional connections before making a career choice.

Everyone has contacts with the world of work before the actual job selection phase be-

gins. You know your parents' profession(s). You might even be familiar with your parents' place of work. In some cases you will have an exact idea, in other cases more a general idea your parents' daily work practice. You know, or at least have an idea of various professions from daily life, from television. Whether these ideas always correspond to reality can often only be proved with direct insight in the form of a training period.

It makes sense to become familiar with the working and vocational world slowly. In particular, you make it easier for a professional advisor, if he/she has access to an as complete as possible documentation of all orientation measures. In this way time can be saved and detours avoided. The following should therefore be included in the documentation:

- a list of the professions I know (e.g. because relatives, acquaintances, friends work in this profession)
- a list of the professions, which interest me
- ideas about dream jobs/discussions with parents, friends

2.4 Documentation of the orientation measures and of the job applications

Here is a list of all measures, which are directly connected with the choice of a profession:

- Use of written and electronic information materials (PC, job centres, newspapers and magazines, brochures)
- Visits to companies (don't just note down the dates, but also the conclusions: Positive and negative, since the right profession can also be found by the method of eliminating the negative points)
- Training periods
- Applications (collection of all letters for applications for training periods, apprenticeships and work posts and the results)

The list should be comprehensive, in particular with regard to the last two points, as it is used not only for the orientation, but is also useful for subsequent applications.

2.5 Application documents

This includes the CV and all references, testimonials and certificates required for an application.

2.6 Documentation of the vocational qualification and activity

- Courses attended/completed during training
- Further training measures
- Employment abroad
- Special projects during training
- Examinations

3. Notes

At regular intervals you should reflect on the entire process, including the vocational training and the work itself. Which goals did I have, which have been achieved? What special achievements have I attained and what problems arose? What do you enjoy a lot, what not so much? Have your interests and wishes changed? The physical situation, i.e. health, should not be neglected here either.

Decisions should also be documented, which are connected to the working life, and their effect. Decisions are seldom everlasting and should be questioned at regular intervals.