

**Evaluation of the further education
program of the Swiss Federal Office
of Public Health on the issue of ad-
diction**

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Lucerne, 28 February 2001

Summary

The Federal Government has been actively involved in further education on the issue of addiction forms since 1991. In an effort to establish an appropriate range of educational offers, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (SFOPH), relying on the input of key professional associations, financed the creation of new structures between 1991 and 1996. On the recommendation of a national committee of experts, the Federal Office agreed to two principles of a new concept of further education in 1997: First, support for programs rather than financing structures, and second establishing a modular further education study program through existing educational institutions. The concept adopted by the committee of experts in 1998 defines the most important principles of further education policy in the area of addiction as follows:

- Designation by the committee of experts of supporting institutions in the faculties of social work, medicine, nursing, psychology and others as well as recognised institutions of further education as possible producers of modules;
- Establishment of a modular further education study program comprising inter- and intra-professional modules with lump sum financing;
- Twice yearly invitations for course proposals and approval of lodged submissions by the committee of experts.

With this new concept the SFOPH addresses the following aims:

- Provision of a further education program that meets the needs of professionals and institutions and is consistent with the aims of the Federal Council's drug and alcohol policy;
- Increase in the number of well trained professionals in the area of addiction
- Promotion of professional practice;
- Strengthening inter-professional collaboration;
- Raising the professional standing of addiction experts;
- Increasing job satisfaction of those active in the area of addiction as well as reducing fluctuation in personnel.

These objectives should be achieved by taking into account the various conditions laid down by the SFOPH, which are defined as:

- Taking into account the legal as well as the illegal areas of addiction;
- Adaptation of the programs to the peculiarities of both geographical regions and language;
- Taking into account experts on addiction as the first priority;
- Taking into account all professional groups affected by the Federal four-pillar policy;
- Taking into account the special situation of people without tertiary education.

With the trial phase of this new further education policy having come to an end (2001), the evaluation presented here was to assess this concept of further education as to its appropriateness and effectiveness. The evaluation focused on three issues:

- Firstly, it was to be assessed whether, to what extent, and in what way the aims of the SFOPH's new educational policy had been achieved.
- Secondly, the appropriateness of the SFOPH's concept of further education in the area of addiction was to be examined with regard to these aims.
- Thirdly, an assessment of the experience with the current policy in the various language regions and of the advantages and limits of the current education policy was to be carried out, with an awareness of the experiences of the SFOPH's previous educational policy in the area of addiction.

The evaluation was based on a cause-and-effect model from political science. On the assumption that the further education policy was conceived as a political program, questions were asked about the implementation of the concept as well as the quality of the output. The next step of the evaluation focused on questions about the effect of the program concerning how addiction specialists carried out their occupation (impact), and finally on the question of the achievement of the aims of the further education policy (outcome). At the level of implementation, the evaluation criteria included in particular the management of the program's operation (program organisation, use of available resources,

planning and guidance at the level of program management, i.e. the committee of experts) as well as the procedural implementation of the program by supporting institutions and module producers at the level of course offers.

In its methodological approach, four main pillars formed the empirical basis of the evaluation. Besides an extensive study of available documents, a secondary assessment of the existing course evaluations was complemented by a written follow-up survey of participants of previous courses as well as a survey of lecturers. As part of the context analysis, numerous structured interviews were conducted with experts on the program's operation (committee of experts and its secretarial office, representatives of the supporting institutions and module producers) as well as experts on the occupations and field practice concerned.

The contextual framework within which the SFOPH's further education policy operates, is characterised essentially by two aspects: The various occupational groups active in the area of addiction as well as the language regions (German-, French- and Italian-speaking areas of Switzerland).

The professionals that are active in the area of addiction come primarily from five occupational fields: Social work, medicine, psychology, nursing and others. The category 'others' groups those without tertiary education who are active in the area of addiction. The current standing of individual occupational groups and the distinctions between them are difficult to determine. Furthermore, there is some overlap of the different occupational groups in relation to the various fields of practice. This overlap is significant in that the varying educational levels of the different occupational groups become relevant, which points to the need for intra- as well as inter-professional further education.

In relation to the language areas, it had to be anticipated that both content and language related aspects of education would be accompanied by different institutional traditions in education as well as in the various addiction related fields of practice, which – it was anticipated – would translate into particular prevailing conditions and distinct paths of development. The evaluation devoted considerable attention to the different language regions, in particular to the specific situation in the canton of Ticino.

We may summarize the results of the evaluation in relation to the three central aspects – the implementation, the output and the impact of the SFOPH's new further education policy – as follows.

Implementation: Operation of the Program and Factors of Management

Both in German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland the new concept led to a new set of structures amongst the field of providers, a process aimed at by the further education policy. The differences in the structure or system development between French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland are probably above all due to contextual aspects rather than fundamental conceptual factors. The empirical evaluation did not provide evidence the differing forms of system development and educational offers in French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland were due to the main characteristics of the new further education concept. Therefore, the concept cannot be assumed to lack coherence. On the contrary, the further education concept consciously leaves the development and formulation of the field's self-organisation open, so that the different contextual parameters can be taken into account during the implementation. So while language-region based differences in the form of competition and coordination may indeed be observed, this does not necessarily affect the scope and quality of the further educational offers. Hence there is no need for program guidance.

In French-speaking Switzerland the exclusion of associations brought about by the change of system led to the formation of the *Fédération romande des organismes de formation dans le domaine des dépendances* (Fordd). On the one hand this had the effect of system development because the Fordd endeavoured to include all the actors involved in the further education policy, including the associations. On the other hand the self-defined coordination function deliberately resulted in the elimination of competition amongst the providers – an effect that was not intended by the SFOPH.

In German-speaking Switzerland further education in the area of addiction developed essentially according to the concept's intended system. A first result was that occupational groups previously inactive in addiction practice could be integrated into the further education policy, and second, that a – partly mutually arranged – concentration on a few providers (cartelisation tendency) took place in the field of social work.

In the canton of Ticino the new further education concept has so far had little effect so far. The role of supporting institution with key responsibility was assigned to the Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana (SUPSI), which is in accordance with the concept. No modules of further education have as yet been completed.

In German-speaking Switzerland the generation of educational offers operates according to the concept's intended system. In French-speaking Switzerland the entire generation of offers and the relevant coordination takes place through Fordd. According to Fordd, it thusly attempts to eliminate potential competition in the language region. This is an effort to explicitly prevent an element of the implicit effects of the further education concept.

The three principles of the concept – program support instead of structural funding, lump sum financing, and the establishment of educational programs with recognised institutions – are undisputed amongst the participating actors of the system and are indeed acknowledged and judged to be correct by these.

The program structure, with its supporting institutions and module producers, was practically established in full in both French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland. The supporting institutions fulfilled an important function in the first phase of implementation, as a system developing and coordinating element. Over and above this, they play an important role as discussion partners for the committee of experts, and as institutions from which the occupation-specific profile development aimed at by the concept could be organised and promoted. However, in the current phase of consolidation of further education policy in the area of addiction, the level of supporting institutions – functioning as a filter for invitations to bid as well as for quality – is rather an excessive structural element.

The committee of experts competently fulfills its function as a quality control and relevance assessment authority during the approval of module proposals. Module producers respect the committee in this function. However, negative decisions are often not very transparent to those submitting proposals, which is probably largely due to the written communication being kept brief on the part of the committee's secretarial office. It is possible to obtain additional oral information, yet this option is not offered clearly enough.

Through the initiation and promotion of *intra*-professional profile development the committee of experts performed an important func-

tion of program guidance during the first phase of policy implementation. From the standpoint of educational policy considerations, this occupation-specific profile development was attributed outstanding significance.

Besides profile development, the further education policy's new system develops additional – more indirect – program guidance effects. This is done through coordination in the various fields of practice and the continuous generation of educational offers induced through the further education market.

The committee of experts has so far done little at the level of content guidance for educational offers. A corresponding framework program – as intended by the concept – has so far not been realised. The committee merely reacts to the structure of educational offers, as the field of providers produces them. In this sense the potential knowledge and experience within the committee of experts is insufficiently utilised. What is not provided for is a 'compulsory program' that is comprehensive with regard to content, balanced, varied and adapted to the current problem situations and developments in the area of addiction. Possible gaps in educational offers are not systematically identified and recorded.

A representative from the canton of Ticino is missing on the committee of experts.

Output: Structure and Quality of the Programs on Offer

Quantitatively speaking there were more further education modules on offer as part of the new concept than with the earlier funding system. Insofar as a cost comparison between the two systems is possible, it can be said that the new concept demonstrates a better cost/benefit ratio than the old system of structural funding through the SFOPH. At least in German-speaking Switzerland the market appears to be nearly saturated. In French-speaking Switzerland the range of offers is of similar size in relative terms.

The quality of further education courses offered gets positive marks overall from course participants also some time after course completion - determined through written follow-up surveys. Deficits in the courses noted by participants lie in the area of a lack of practical use and insufficient participation in the course.

The expertise and didactic quality of the lecturers is rated positively by a large proportion of the participants. The majority of lecturers teaches regularly and repeatedly in further education courses. However, a slight majority of the lecturers has no specific didactic training or training in adult education.

Clear disparities can be seen in the regional distribution of course offers. In the northwestern and eastern parts of German-speaking Switzerland, including Grisons, there is little further education on offer. In French-speaking Switzerland no courses are offered in the Valais and in the area of Fribourg-Neuchâtel-Jura. In western Switzerland a marked concentration is recognisable in the Lausanne-Geneva area.

Those involved in the field consider the differentiation applied by the SFOPH (and therefore also in the concept) between funding of educational offers in the legal and illegal areas of addiction to be less and less up to date and therefore hardly appropriate. Boundaries that are meaningful with regard to content can practically no longer be drawn between the two areas nowadays – with the exception of particular theme-specific *intra*-professional issues – since institutions orientate themselves less and less often around a specific area of addiction.

The aim set by the SFOPH, according to which all professionals affected by the Federal Four-Pillar-Policy are to have the benefit of further educational offers, has not been fully achieved. The range on offer did not adequately cover the two areas of prevention and repression.

The concentration or limitation of funding to addiction specialists is considered by many – particularly in French-speaking Switzerland – to be too narrow a way of looking at things. In particular in the area of prevention – a ‘pillar’ that is under-represented in the funded range of offers – additional groups of people who do not belong to the category of ‘addiction professionals’ need to be targeted in further education.

The principle of a minimum course duration of three days for a module entitled to subsidies – defined in the concept because of an established point of view in educational research – is deemed as too rigid amongst wide circles of providers and those affected within the various fields of practice. The difficulty in the occupational field of medical practitioners to comply with this principle has led to a relaxation of the rule restricted to this occupational group. For understandable reasons, other occupational groups consider this situation unfair.

Impact: Effect of the Further Education Policy on Occupational Practice and the Occupational Field

The development of profiles (initiated and financially supported by the committee of experts) of the individual occupational fields that are defined in the concept is to be rated positively. This has led to intensive processes of reflection in all fields about what *intra*-professional knowledge and skills are necessary in the area of addiction. The variable homogeneity and differentiation of each occupational and practical field has had a bearing on the varying effort and success of this profile development in the individual occupational fields.

The concept has resulted in strong funding for inter-professional offers. Almost two thirds of the surveyed participants also confirm that they have been able to improve their inter-disciplinary knowledge through the courses taken. Those involved in the various fields of practice are also of the opinion that the emphasis of further education must lie on an inter-professional and inter-disciplinary approach. Only the medical practitioners evidently have difficulty participating in inter-disciplinary orientated events.

Since the responsibility for planning and realising further education modules is transferred to educational institutions and because professional associations and practice-related organisations are generally excluded from the SFOPH's official further education policy, there is no conceptually and structurally guaranteed interconnection between practice and module producers. Consequently, it is not assured either that demand for further education in different occupations in the individual fields of practice is continuously and systematically identified and recorded.

Conclusions on the Achievement of Objectives

We can conclude the following as to the question of what the SFOPH's further education policy within the framework of the new concept has achieved and where weaknesses were identified:

- At the conceptual level (further education concept) and the operative level (committee of experts, committee's secretarial office, module producers) a quantitatively (in relation to the size of the field of practice) and qualitatively good output has been achieved through an efficient process (personnel and financial costs, system of lump sum financing) for German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland.

- The intra-professional aspect of further education in the area of addiction was promoted through the profile development required by the committee of experts.
- The large range of relevant further education modules on offer promoted inter-professional collaboration.
- Provisions for an appropriate range of educational offers in the canton of Ticino have not been achieved within the framework of the further education policy to date.
- The task of drawing up a program for content guidance has not been fulfilled by the committee of experts. Likewise, no guidance of educational offers (output guidance) based on a monitoring system with language-regional differentiation has been put in place. Both aspects have resulted in the fact that the SFOPH's further education policy provides no guarantee that a range of further education is on offer that is adapted to the different language regions, that is comprehensive in content, and that takes into consideration all occupational groups and all those groups addressed by the Four-Pillar Policy.

Principal Recommendations

The committee of experts should develop a system of output guidance. This must take into account the language-regional peculiarities and developments, and it is to be based content-wise on a system of scientific and practice-related monitoring. Besides the function of continuing to assess quality and relevance of the educational offers that the market generates, the range of themes expected by the SFOPH and committee of experts must be brought to the attention of the field of providers in a periodically redefined support program. A continuous evaluation of programs and educational offers must ensure that all relevant occupational groups and all those groups addressed by the Federal Four-Pillar Policy have a corresponding range of further education offers at their disposal.

In the new concept of further education policy the associations are no longer assigned operative functions, primarily out of educational policy considerations (assurance of continuity and stability in educational offers, higher priority assigned to educational know-how). Nevertheless the affected associations and practice-related organisations must be assigned a defined role in the implementation concept (as-

essment of need and sensor-function in practice and occupational fields) by SFOPH's further education policy in the area of addiction. This makes it possible to implement an interconnection between practice and providers at an organisational level.