My ID Newsletter

This is the fourth newsletter of the SENSE-My-ID project. The project aims to integrate sensitivity for sexual diversity (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex – LGBTI - issues) in vocational training.

The project runs from January 2019 until May 2021. Products were prepared in 2019 and piloted in 2019-2020. In this newsletter we report on the discussion about vocational competences. The project partners offer these articles as triggers for discussion on the potential need to revise national VET competence frameworks.

Online meeting on competences

Development of the SENSE competence framework

The sense competence framework was developed in 3 phases. The first phase was a brainstorm, which raised 22 possible competences These all were still quite general and not LGBTI specific.

The second phase happened during our project meeting in Città di Castello in early 2020. We discussed the competences in two ways. In the first place we engaged in a selection process to reduce the original number of competences to 11. In the second place we discussed the relationship between generic competences and specific LGBTI competences. We will come back on this below.

In the third phase we worked out the competence document to include concrete suggestions on how to implement the competences in teaching practice. In this phase we also discovered that it would be very useful to distinguish between the competences of students - on which we originally focused - and the required competences of teachers to educate the student competences. We decided to develop two competence frameworks: one on student competences and one on teacher competences. Both documents are linked because they are like a cascade: the teacher competences are based on the student competences.

Generic or specific competences?

It is worthwhile to give some extra attention to the discussion about the relationship between generic competences and specific LGBTI competences. Initially, we wondered whether we needed a list of specific competences relating to LGBTI issues and concerns, or whether we should identify generic
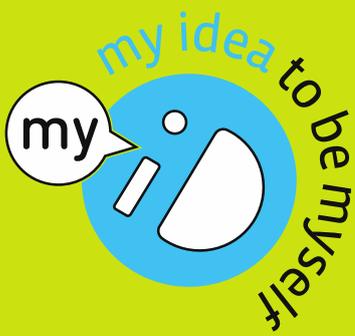
competences and stress the need to implement them in an inclusive way.

Our conclusion was that it would be wise to formulate the recommendations for VET competences as generic competences, but to clarify how these core generic competences need to be interpreted when relating to LGBTI people. This approach has several advantages. In the first place, it makes clear that treating LGBTI students, clients, patients and customers is *not* special. They should be considered part of the normal required skills of vocational professionals. Vocational professionals have to be sensitive of LGBTI needs, but also of immigrant needs, cultural needs, religious needs, needs of disabled people and so on. In the second place, labelling some professional competences as specific for LGBTI can involve the risk to focus on knowledge, rather than on attitudes and behaviour.

For example, a competence framework could demand that vocational professionals have extensive knowledge about specific needs of LGBTI people, about their history, about their specific health challenges, and so on. But it would be difficult to decide *which* information should be mandatory and which information could be counted as useful but additional. Furthermore, from research we know that having more knowledge does not predict a positive attitude or supportive behaviour. It seems to us that vocational professionals in the first place need to have a positive attitude, and basic skills to be able to deal with differences, rather than being fully aware of all the details of the situation of all the minorities.

Eleven competences

The student's framework has been subdivided in intra-personal competences and inter-personal competences. There are six intrapersonal competences:

1. Coping skills
2. Self-Esteem
3. Self-Control
4. Self-Awareness
5. Self-Confidence
6. Accepting Feedback and criticism

We chose five key interpersonal competences:
7. Diversity awareness
8. Respect and dignity awareness
9. Respect for others
10. Adaptable
11. Empathy

Greek initiatives for a more open, inclusive and diverse VET framework

The Greek VET national competencies framework is largely state determined, mostly implemented through a school-based approach while the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has its overall supervision. VET education is offered after the completion of compulsory schooling, mainly at upper secondary and post-secondary level.

Low status of VET

Greek society strongly favours general education and views university studies as the main path towards success. Both these factors reflect sociological stereotypes rooted in long-lasting perceptions that make vocational education and training less attractive to the youth. VET education in Greece faces several challenges related to higher dropout rates, multiplicity and complexity of the legal framework governing it, challenges regarding the design and implementation of VET-related policies as well as impediments to linking VET education to the labour market.

Sexual diversity education

When it comes to sexual diversity awareness, there is lack of a school subject dedicated to sex education and sexual diversity as these topics are only discussed in the framework of other subjects taught such as Physical Education or Biology. At the same time, relevant awareness-raising activities are also limited.

interpersonal competences

Diversity-awareness
Empathy
Respect Adaptable
Respecting

The student's framework describes concretely what each of these generic competences means for VET students relating to how they treat LGBTI people. The framework has an additional section with suggestions for activities teachers can use to train the competences.

The teacher's framework elaborates how teachers can stimulate and support competences of students in the area. It refers to the competences the teachers need themselves, not only to emulate the student competences but also which competences they need to teach and coach the student competences. The teacher's framework also offers some background information to make teachers feel more comfortable as to why these competences are necessary.

[Framework for student competences](#)

[Framework for teacher competences](#)

On the GALE website, emerging [translations](#) can also be found.

However, in recent years, the need for students to become more aware of their sexual identity and that of their classmates and teachers and also learn how to deal with sexual diversity within the school context has been highlighted. At the same time, many organisations also offer specialized trainings and seminars for teaching staff so they can introduce sexual diversity topics and trigger discussion in the classroom.

The VET competence framework

While Greece has demonstrated good performance in several areas of VET policy-making, as well as implementation in alignment with European guidelines and strategic thematic priorities, these efforts need time to yield concrete results and reach their maximum potential. Since 2016, the Ministry of Education has been conducting a major reform of the VET system and its competencies framework. The main goal of the reform is to offer vocational education that is less focused on overspecialization in certain technical vet fields rather than on acquisition of more general and useful skills that improve employability, well-being prospects, adaptability and social inclusion. Among these reform initiatives, there was also discussion on greater integration of LGBT sensitivity issues within the national VET curriculum. Over the last years, there have been major concerns of LGBT members based on the lack of knowledge on the part of teaching staff on how to introduce and trigger discussion on LGBT issues in the classroom.

Activities to combat discrimination

Recently, an Observatory of School Violence and Discrimination Prevention (http://paratiritirio.minedu.gov.gr/) has been founded in Greece in order to prevent discriminatory behaviours among students and also inform and raise awareness among the school communities on diversity in the VET framework as part of the curriculum and activities of the school. This observatory promotes positive role models and also respect, tolerance and acceptance of diversity in school communities. Therefore, it paves the way for the development of sexual diversity competencies in the classroom.

http://paratiritirio.minedu.gov.gr

Apart from that, in the framework of the FAROS project (https://www.kmop.gr/projects-vf/faros/) that has launched in Greece, certain capacity building workshops on LGBT sensitivity targeting civil servants, including teaching staff, will be organized. The main purpose of those seminars will be to identify and deal with barriers to access protection and services for LGBT, identify ways to ensure a welcoming environment and developing staff policies that ensure tolerance and inclusion in the public services sector.

Although there is still room for improvement, it seems quite promising that there are initiatives that can lead to the modernization of the VET school competencies framework. The main goal of all these initiatives seems to be the introduction of LGBT sensitivity and sexual diversity topics within the curriculum and VET school activities, focusing on understanding, tolerance and respect that are also
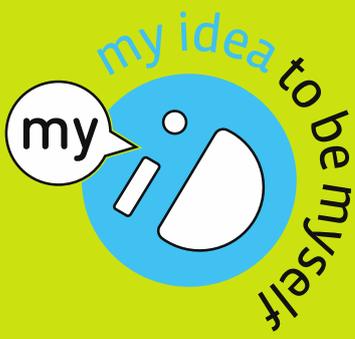
the pillars of the national education system in Greece.

Regional good practice VET policies in Spain

On February 6, Juan Escalona from our partner DEFOIN interviewed Antonio Lorenzo Quesada García. Mr. García is a retired Inspector of Education and an expert on how Spanish schools implement diversity in their work. In this article we give an impression of the interview. In the sources of this article, the links to the full texts in English and Spanish can be found.

The Spanish autonomous communities

Education is largely decentralized in Spain. Spain is a federation of autonomous regions, called "communities". The communities are not independent states but they are more autonomous than provinces in other countries. On the central level, Spain has a series Constitutional Laws, which form the central Spanish framework guiding the autonomous communities. Each community then develops its own educational legal framework and strategy – which must be inline with the central Constitutional Law on Education.

The 25th provision

Mr. García says he thinks the level of inclusion of LGTBI diversity in the Spanish educational system , including vocational training, is generally low. The Constitutional Law on Education makes reference to LGBTI diversity, by stressing autonomous communities have to include diversity based on respect for affective-sexual relations and family diversity. In a "25th additional provision" , the central authorities ask autonomous communities to require from schools that they include and justify the measures they develop to encourage and train equality in all stages of education.

The 25th additional provision
"In its educational projects, the schools must include and justify the measures they develop to encourage and train equality in all stages of education, including education to combat gender-based violence, respect for identities, cultures, sexualities and their diversity, and active participation to make equality a reality ... "
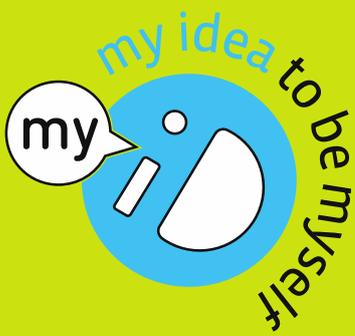
However, the 25th provision is not always implemented by autonomous educational administrations, and if they do, they differ in the way they detail this in their regional legislation and strategies. Mr. Garcia offers some positive examples from the Canary Islands, Extremadura, Basque Country and Andalusia.

Canary Islands

In the case of the Canary Islands, the community Ministry of Education has incorporated the prevention and detection of homophobic and transphobic harassment in a transversal way in all its lines of action. The key transversal strategy is an *Equality Accreditation* of teachers and all other employees being responsible for education of public schools, except universities. This accreditation is a pioneering initiative in all of Spain. In the training, it offers specific knowledge about the prevention of harassment due to homophobia and transphobia.

Extremadura

In March 2105, the parliament of Extremadura approved a law on social equality for LGBTI people in public policies. This law dedicates a specific chapter to LGBTI education. It calls upon schools to have a comprehensive LGBTI Education and Diversity Plan. This plan should include educational content that is inclusive, it should show how the school monitors and prevents discrimination and protects sexual minorities and it should outline how the school trains teachers and other staff on sexual diversity and on LGBTI families.

Basque Country

In 2002, the Basque Country community launched an information service for attention to issues related to sexual and gender diversity. The service advises schools on how to deal with discrimination of LGBTI people. The service also provides support and training on how to integrate sexual diversity in their curriculum. The center offers educational materials and resources on its website.

Andalusia

In 2014, Andalusia, implemented a law and presented a specific protocol of action on gender identity in schools. García sees this protocol as a model for autonomous communities and schools on how to deal with students who have a gender identity that is different from the one assigned at birth. The protocol does not offer closed answers, but presents general principles of action that must be adapted to each school. It makes it mandatory for schools to establish:
1. adequate ways of labelling and communication
2. organizational and educational measures (like inclusion in the curriculum and accessibility of bathrooms)
3. actions to undertake with students, teachers and families
4. a way to monitor, prevent, or intervene in cases of bullying due to transphobia
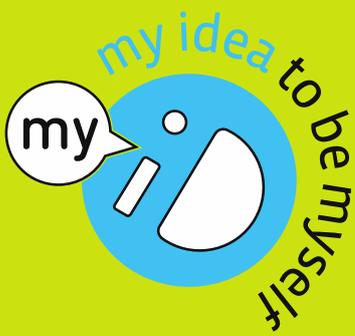
Barriers to LGBT sensitivity and how to overcome them

In his interview with Juan Escalona, Mr. Quesada García also gave some views of barriers to LGBT sensitivity in VET institutions, and how to overcome them.

Mr. García points out there are 6 barriers schools need to overcome, and on which governments can help schools to overcome them.

The first challenge he mentions is invisibility. School managers and teachers often don't realize how a negative school culture makes LGBTI students vulnerable and forces them to restrict their self expression.

A second challenge is widespread bullying. According to the Spanish Youth Institute (2011), three out of four young people between 15 and 29 years old have witnessed homophobic attacks in their schools, ranging from rumors, insults to ridicule, and 6.4%

have witnessed beatings of lesbians, gay, bisexual or trans. Around 20% of young people express a clear rejection of sexual diversity.

Third are prejudices. We should not presume people's heterosexuality or gender and admit there are many ways of being heterosexual, homosexual , bisexual or trans. We should not make LGBTI exceptional, but we must recognize prejudices, myths and false about them.

Fourth is language, which reflects discrimination. We should use inclusive and non-sexist language and avoid saying things like "maricon" (faggot), "bollera" (dyke) or "marimacho" (butch).

Fifth is practice of labelling, we should avoid defining LGBTI people only based on their difference.
Sixth is the non-involvement of teachers, students and families, when they do not respond to depreciative comments and attitudes which show disrespect of diversity.

Overcoming barriers

García identifies 17 ways to overcome these barriers.

1. Base your school strategy on a good analysis of the situation in your school, so you know what you can do against homophobia and transphobia in a tailored way.

2. Establish anonymous evaluation tools on the school climate and well-being in the school, including, among others, discrimination due to homophobia or transphobia.
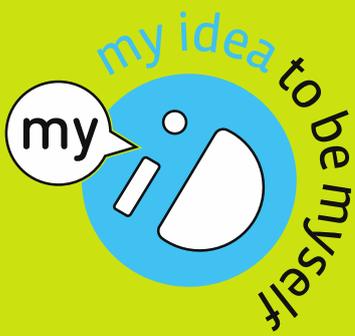
3. Establish confidential mechanisms to report and respond to homophobic bullying.

Dutch Minister of Education makes bathrooms in ministry gender-neutral (July 2016)

4. Improve the spaces in the school (gender-neutral bathrooms for example).

5. Review registration sheets and formal documents to avoid a presumption of all students having heterosexual parents or of being labelled as their birth gender.

6. Describe clearly how sexual diversity and the fight against sexism and homophobia will be included in the curriculum and the antibullying or well-being plan.

7. Involve the entire educational community (students, staff, parents).

8. Incorporate activities, programs and actions against LGBTI harassment at all levels of accredited

LGBT Awareness Days and Weeks

February: LGBT History Month
26 April: Lesbian visibility day
17 May: International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT)
3rd Saturday June: Gay (LGBT) Pride (locally also other dates)
23 September: Bisexuality Day
11 October: Coming-out Day
3rd Wednesday October: Pronouns Day
20 November: Transgender Day of Remembrance

vocational trainings of the VET institute.

9. Let the school take in LGBTI awareness days and events.

10. Ask advice and collaborate with LGBTI associations.
11. Involve the Parent's Council in the awareness work and training.

12. Implement specific lessons on sexual and gender diversity.

13. Conduct information and training on how to offer adequate sex education.

14. The Guidance Department should have updated resources on LGBTI realities.

15. Use neutral grouping criteria, like age, birth month or alphabetical order to avoid using sex/gender as a criterion.

16. Promote non-sexist coeducational games, encourage reading literature without gender stereotypes.
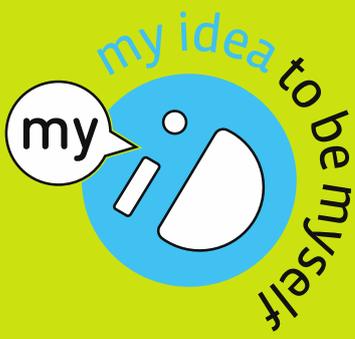
17. Do not tolerate sexist or homophobic comments, jokes or teasing by students or by school staff, either in class or outside of it, and whether or not they are directed at LGBTI people.

The Dutch VET competence framework

The Dutch vocational competence framework consists of two parts: generic frameworks for a professional sector and a large series of specific frameworks. The specific frameworks referred to specific skills for different vocations. These are usually technical skills.

Generic skill to be client friendly

For the SENSE project, the generic skills framework for social sector is more interesting, because it refers to the skills every vocational students should have.

The generic skills framework is subdivided in different aspects, like the language, calculus, communication, environmental awareness, health and citizenship. For the SENSE project the skill set relating to citizenship is most important. These skills relate, among others, to discrimination, tolerance and being able to deal with diversity. In the VET framework, these skills are translated to the work situation, which meant that the framework did not refer to human rights and diversity language. Instead, competences were worded as the skill to be friendly towards customers, clients or patients, and to be sensitive to their needs. Although LGBTI people were

originally not specifically mentioned, the wording of the competences was rather neutral and inclusive.

For example, when referring to the needs of patients, students are required to involve the support network of the patient and it is made explicit that this can be the family but also other significant people. This is important because LGBT may have lost the support of their family due to discrimination and rejection, and often rely more on a circle of like-minded friends.

Government decision to change the framework

The national lesbian and gay grassroots organization of the Netherlands has lobbied for long time to make it mandatory for schools to give attention to sexual and gender diversity. In 2012, this became mandatory in primary and secondary education. In 2019, the government pushed for a change of the VET competence frameworks as well. The relevant competence was changed in: "The participant recognizes and acknowledges the basic values of our society such as human rights and acceptance of diversity (including ethnic, religious, sexual and gender diversity), learns to deal with value dilemmas".

> "The participant recognizes and acknowledges the basic values of our society such as human rights and acceptance of diversity (including ethnic, religious, sexual and gender diversity), learns to deal with value dilemmas."

In part, the decision to alter the framework was also based on previous activities in the VET sector, like a
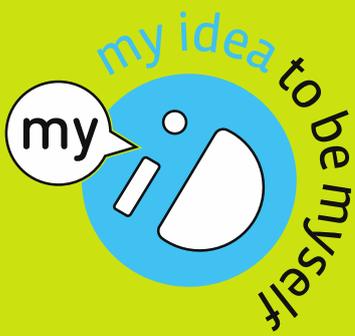
research by Edu-Diverse (the Dutch partner of GALE) and the related awareness and training activities in the national LGBT VET project, which formed the basis for the SENSE project and the My-ID methodology.

Is acknowledging basic values enough?

The question remains whether the formal change of the formal competence framework is enough to change the practice in VET institutions and courses.

Evaluations of the earlier adoption of change in the core objectives of primary and secondary education have shown that the number of schools giving attention to sexual diversity has risen from about 15% to about 80% since 2012, but at the quality of the attention lags behind. The adopted core competence in primary and secondary education calls for students to learn "respect for sexual diversity", but the type of attention is mainly a shallow explanation of the labels LGBT, which is a far cry from establishing a supportive attitude or behavior.

Likewise, in VET it can be questioned whether making it mandatory to "recognize and acknowledge" acceptance of diversity is enough to support VET teachers to implement this guidance effectively. There is no separate teacher training for VET teachers, they are trained in a generic way in the regular (higher vocational) teacher training institutes.

Blog:

Peter Dankmeijer

Linking non-discriminatory attitudes to the EQF

In this article I will attempt to relate the SENSE-competences to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers can use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.
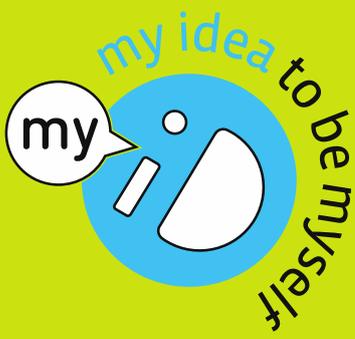
EQF: 8 levels

The core of the EQF concerns eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'. The levels range from basic (level 1) to advanced (level 8). The levels are divided in sections relating to "Knowledge", "Skills", and "Responsibility and autonomy". In the SENSE-project, we found out that competences relating to LGBTI+ issues mainly have to do with attitudes, a domain which is not explicitly described in the EQF. I would like to summarize the "skills" category here, because – compared to knowledge and autonomy – it relates most to attitudes. Any skill can only be learned or used in practice when preceded by a positive attitude the acquire this skill. In a way, the 8 levels of skills presented here can also be read as "attitudes to…".

1. basic skills to carry out simple tasks
2. practical skills to solve routine problems
3. skills to solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods
4. generate solutions to specific problems
5. develop creative solutions to abstract problems
6. advanced skills to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field
7. develop new knowledge and procedures, integrate knowledge from different fields
8. synthesis to solve critical problems and redefine existing knowledge and practice

Five levels of tolerance

In the previous newsletter, I presented a five stage model of increasing tolerance I developed during this project.

When we compare this model to the EQF skill levels, it becomes immediately clear that the first two stages can not be related to the EQF model. Even basic skills can not be adequately implemented when students (or teachers) openly reject LGBTI+ clients, or even when they disapprove of them without directly harming them. Since we know that some students actually do reject LGBTI+ clients, it seems that the EQF framework in its current form falls short of describing basic skills, or at least their preceding necessary attitudes relating to discrimination. This may be a topic to discuss in circles or experts developing the EQF.

Five stages of tolerance (Peter Dankmeijer, 2020)

Disgust, rejection, discrimination

Disapproval without harming behaviour

Indifference, social distance

Friendly equal treatment, not acknowledging real differences

Always inquisitive, sensitive and helpful
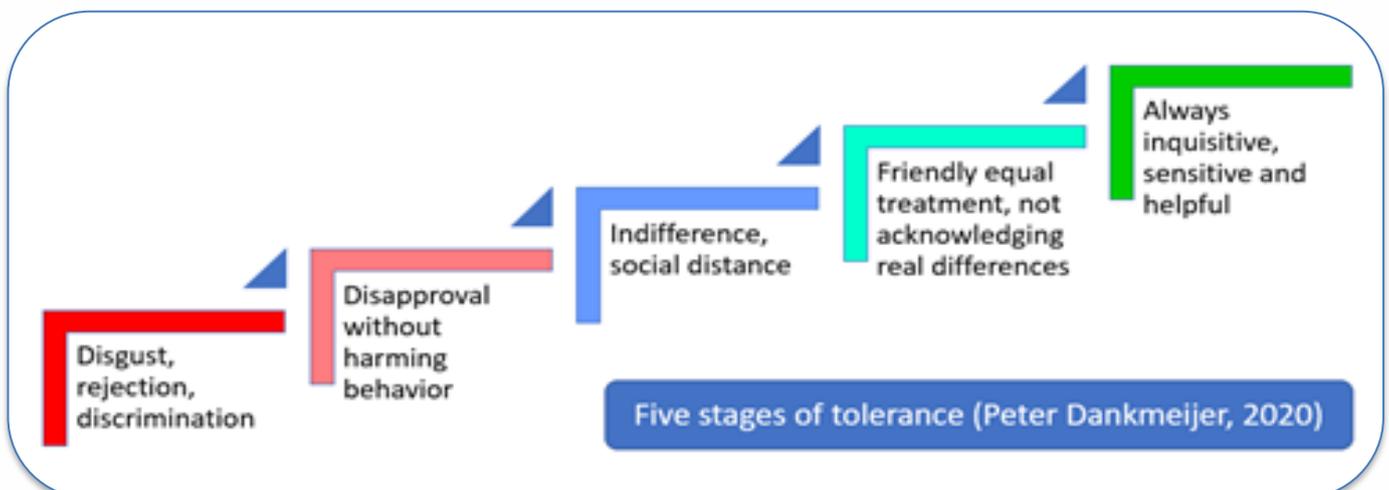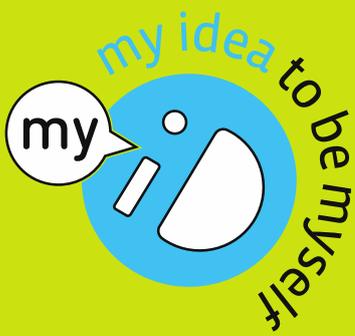
"Neutral" but non-sensitive attitude

From my personal experience in Dutch vocational courses and from research on Dutch vocational students, I know that a substantial number of vocational students locate themselves in stage 3 and 4 of my tolerance model. In our Dutch research, we asked students to what degree they agreed with the statement: "I would say to gay or lesbians they should keep their hands off me". In the Dutch context, such an expression would relate to my first stage of (in) tolerance. 56% of the students agreed with this statement and only 19% disagreed.

"I would say to gay or lesbian students they should keep their hands off me" (Answers of 2828 Dutch vocational students in 2014)

- surely
- I don't know
- certainly not
- not filled in
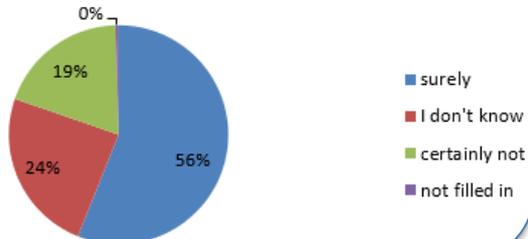
In this research we also asked students how they would treat LGBT clients in their work field. In this question we did not give them the option to totally reject such clients, because it would be clear this would be a socially undesirable answer, and indeed, contrary to the Dutch formal VET Competence Framework. But we did ask them about stage 2 ("I would avoid them"), stage 3 ("I would be correct but distant"), stage 4 ("I would treat them as any other") and stage 5 ("I would consider their specific needs").

The responses showed that minorities of 5% and 11% would more or less avoid LGBT clients (stage 2 and 3), while a majority of 66% would maintain an equal treatment attitude, but without considering diversity needs. Only 16% would consider diversity needs (stage 5).

When I read the EQF skills, I would estimate that neutrally and without sensitivity following the same procedure for all clients would correspond to levels

How would you treat LGBT clients? Answers of 2774 Dutch vocational students in 2014

- I would avoid them
- I would be correct but distant
- I would treat them as any other
- I would consider their specific needs
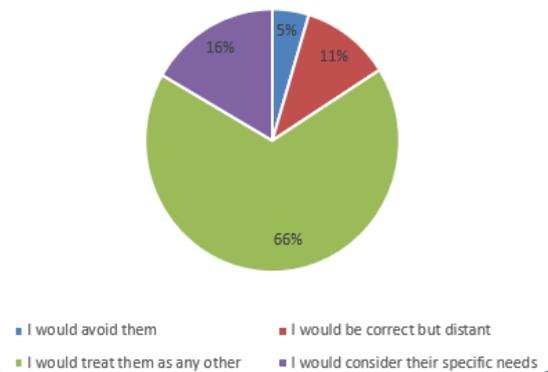
1 through 3, but that any more advanced skill would require a diversity sensitivity and attitude, otherwise the corresponding skill cannot develop.
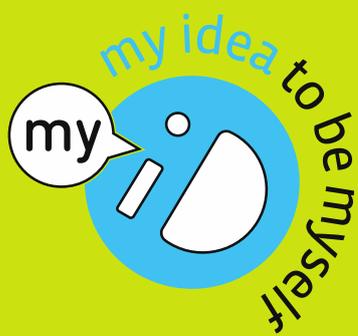
Topics for debate

Of course all of these reflections are still early analyses and guesses. The Dutch research in 2014 nor the SENSE project was focused or equipped to fully explore and research the relationship between current attitudes and skills of vocational students, LGBT sensitivity and required skills. So this leaves us for much to debate.

1. Should the current EQF be updated to include benchmarking for (non-)discriminatory attitudes?

2. Do we need some minimum standards for non-discriminatory attitudes and intentions of practitioners to treat clients in their workplaces, and of vocational students?

3. How can vocational teachers coach their students to move from stage 1 or later to stage 5?

Peter Dankmeijer

Sources: Europass https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Qualifications_Framework

Final Conference SENSE 18 May

The final conference of SENSE will be online through Zoom. It will be in two parts: an English part from 13:00-16:00 CET and a Dutch part from 16:00-17:00 CET.

The conference will start with a presentation of the products and showing the videoclips students made. European stakeholders will inform us about the latest European LGBTI policies. After a break there will be break out sessions in which participants can discuss to what extent and how attention for LGBTI issues should be integrated in the (H)VET sector. Finally, a short debate about this will take place between European stakeholders and the attendants.

In the Dutch part of the conference, the focus will be on presenting how ROC van Amsterdam integrated LGBTI sensitivity and o how VET students developed a helpdesk website for students. It will end with a short discussion on how Dutch policy can be more effective in helping VET institutions to integrate LGBTI sensitivity.

Register here for the SENSE Final Conference on Zoom!