

Latest News: the Specialist Certificate in Work and Organizational Psychology

In 2015, EAWOP and EFPA developed the materials required to launch the EuroPsy Specialist Certificate in Work and Organizational Psychology (hereafter the Specialist Certificate). During 2016, three countries (Finland, Norway and Spain) established their Specialist National Awarding Committees (or S-NAC) and began the process of receiving applications and awarding the Specialist Certificate. To update you on this initiative José Ramos interviewed Salvatore Zappalà the current Chair of the Specialist European Awarding Committee to talk about the process.

About the interviewee

Salvatore Zappalà is an Associate Professor of Organizational Psychology at the University of Bologna, in Italy. He currently teaches “Organization Change & Development” and conducts research on readiness to change, service climate, and inter-organizational collaboration.



He served on the Executive Committee of EAWOP from 2009 to 2015. In that period he acted as liaison between EAWOP and the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA), in relation to the Specialist Certificate project.

In 2015 he established and chairs the Specialist Certificate Awarding Committee, a body that promotes and supports the European national associations of Work and Organizational Psychologists in the adoption and implementation of the Specialist Certificate.

The Interview

What is the Specialist Certificate, and what has been the process for its development?

The EuroPsy Specialist Certificate in Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) is a European standard of education and professional training in WOP. It is part of the EuroPsy system, which is a project developed and run by EFPA. EAWOP contributed to this project by developing and testing the standards of education and training for psychologists in the WOP field. Thus, any WO Psychologist who meets the standard can obtain the Specialist Certificate and be included in the public Register of European Psychologists managed by EFPA.

Anyway, before going further, let me anticipate that in May 2017, at the EAWOP Congress in Dublin, there will be a roundtable focused on discussing and presenting the Specialist Certificate. That roundtable will be a good opportunity to present more details than allowed by this interview and participants will be able to raise questions as well as meet and discuss with country representatives who are implementing the Specialist Certificate.

Who awards this certificate?

It is the Specialist National Awarding Committee (S-NAC) that awards the Specialist Certificate. The S-NAC is a team that can be established in each European country by the national association of psychologists in connection with the EAWOP Constituent. WO Psychologists apply to the S-NAC of their own country, and the S-NAC will evaluate and determine the outcomes of the applications. If the WO Psychologist positively fulfils the standard their name is sent to the public European register held at EFPA's Head Office, in Brussels. You can now have a look and consult the register at: <http://www.europsy-efpa.eu/find-a-psychologist>

What are the main aims of the Specialist Certificate?

WO psychologists increasingly work for multinational companies or in international settings. The growing mobility of psychologists, as well as of their clients, makes it necessary to develop tools and standards to safeguard clients' interests at a European rather than a national level.

The Specialist Certificate does neither substitute nor replace national laws and rules for professional practice; but is an addition to these. The Specialist Certificate aims to support the recognition of qualifications of psychologists working outside their own country in the EU (as laid down in the European Directive 2005/36/EC, the Qualifications Directive). Further, this process is a way to show that the community of WO psychologists, pro-actively, has established its own standards of quality and has tools to check and increase the quality of these services provided to clients.

What are the requirements that need to be fulfilled to obtain the Specialist Certificate?

The Specialist Certificate is an add-on to the EuroPsy Certificate in Psychology (called the EuroPsy "Basic"). The Basic certificate is awarded to psychologists' having five years training in Psychology, one year of supervised practice and can show a certain level of competence. Thus it is a certificate at the "entry level" of the profession. The Specialist Certificate is awarded to psychologists that already possess the Basic Certificate and that can show additional post-graduate education, as well as a higher level of competence. In particular, applicants must demonstrate: a) between 60 to 90 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, see http://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/european-credit-transfer-accumulation-system_en) of postgraduate educational activities; b) at least three years of experience and practice in the WOP field; and c) during these three years there should be at least 400 hours per annum of supervised (or coached) practice (thus, at least 1200 hours in three years) and, during the same three years, at least 50 hours of supervision per year (thus, at least 150 hours in three years). Evidence of practice and of the specialist competences can be included in a log book ("portfolio").

The Specialist Certificate is based in the acquisition of specialist professional competences. Could you give some detail about the competency model?

The overall purpose of practicing as a professional psychologist is to apply psychological principles, knowledge and methods in an ethical and scientific way in order to promote the well-being and effectiveness of individuals, groups and organizations. In order to do so, the professional psychologist has to develop, practice and implement two main groups of competences: a) those relating to the psychological content of the professional practice (Primary competences); and b) those enabling practitioners to render their services effectively (Enabling competences).

The Primary competences are unique for the psychological profession, in terms of content, knowledge and skills required for performance. There are 20 Primary competences grouped into six functional categories: i) Goal specification; ii) Assessment of individuals, groups or organizational units; iii) Development of interventions; iv) Implementation of interventions; v) Evaluation; and vi) Communication.

The Enabling competences are competences that psychologists share with other professions and providers of services. There are nine competences, which include, among others: attention to Continuous Professional Development, capacity to develop and maintain professional relations, having a professional strategy, practice management, quality assurance, or self-reflection.

Competences are self-assessed by the psychologist, and/or by their supervisor, on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means that the basic knowledge and skill is present but it is insufficiently developed, and 4 means that the competence allows them to perform complex tasks without guidance or supervision.

Supervised practice is the main basis of assessment of the Specialist Certificate; can you explain the importance of supervision and the implications for our discipline?

The acquisition of competences, and of higher level of competences, requires practice and also feedback on that practice. Thus, an important goal of supervision is helping to connect knowledge and skills with the components of a specific project, or activity, that unfolds as the project develops, taking into account the rules of professional ethics. Supervision may also help in connecting the relevant contextual factors (as social, legal or economic conditions) that may influence the effectiveness of the intervention with a specific client. Supervision helps the new WO Psychologist to deal with the complex context of the intervention and the multi-faceted learning process; facilitating reflection and self-awareness.

However, although the importance of supervision is widely recognised and endorsed, it is also true that in the WOP field only few European countries have a tradition of systematic supervised practice and procedures for training supervisors, delivering supervision and taking note of the advancements

promoted by the process. Supervision, or as it is more often called in our field, coaching or mentoring, can thus promote the learning process and a higher level of awareness of the competences and expert services that WO Psychologists possess and can provide to their clients. In the end, it may consolidate the sense of a more professionalised discipline, which tries to guarantee even more professionalised services, training a new generation of competent and expert practitioners.

At moment, what is the process of implementation of the Specialist Certificate among EAWOP Constituents?

EAWOP is an important stakeholder of the EuroPsy Specialist Certificate, because it is formed by national associations that group together WO psychologists in each European country. EAWOP Constituents associations have regular contact with WO psychologists; they know their competences, successes and also their needs and challenges; and thus they have the interest to promote and support the professionalisation and competent practice of their associates.

In fact, from Spring, 2012 to Spring, 2013 five EAWOP Constituents participated in a pilot of the Specialist Certificate, which showed that the standards can be met by WO Psychologists. As a result, the Specialist Certificate has been officially started by EFPA in 2015. Now, three EAWOP constituents, Finland, Norway and Spain, have applied to set up their Specialist National Awarding Committees in their respective countries. The application was submitted to the Specialist European Awarding committee (S-EAC), the body that coordinates the Specialist Certificate. After some clarification, the S-EAC approved the three applications and those S-NACs started to work, translating the information materials into the local language, organising seminars and events to spread information across the country and solicit applications from WO Psychologists. Thus, we expect that Specialist Certificates will be issued in those countries in the near future.

What are your opinions regarding the impact of the Specialist Certificate around Europe?

The Specialist Certificate can have a great impact in Europe, and beyond. It can have a positive impact for both single practitioners and for the whole profession; that is formed by a multitude of single practitioners! WO Psychologists work in a field in which there is a lot of competition with practitioners from other disciplines. The Specialist Certificate can increase the positive reputation of a single practitioner showing that they fulfil a European standard of quality; It is like a company showing it's ISO certificate.

Next, in order to get the Specialist Certificate applicants have to provide evidence of an advanced level of competence. This is a novelty for our profession (as well as for many others) and is an important addition to simply writing the list of previous contracts or famous clients, because it describes specific psychological competences. In order to be successful in a competitive market WO Psychologists need to become more aware and more able to self-

assess and to provide concrete evidence of their competences; and this an additional advantage of the project.

Thirdly, WO Psychologists often work abroad, in a different country from their own, and the Specialist Certificate can be an additional element to their CV; facilitating obtaining a license to practice in that other country, even if it does not automatically provide such a license.

Fourthly, the Specialist Certificate is an opportunity of improvement not only for the single practitioner but also for the whole profession. An impact that the Specialist Certificate can have on the profession concerns two challenges: in order to become specialist, many professions have clear educational paths and supervised practice procedures after the graduation. In our field, specialised knowledge and supervised practice are often present and available to practitioners, but they are often sparse and unsystematic. It is probably time to recognise that we do a complex job, and that we need to develop more structured and assisted processes of professionalisation. These processes are already available in some countries, and the Specialist Certificate can be the opportunity for all the EAWOP Constituents to share experiences and develop a more unified shared model of education, training and supervision. This process will facilitate the younger generation of practitioners to navigate the job market in a more confident way, and, ultimately, more successfully.

Finally, would you like to comment on anything more?

Yes. The Specialist Certificate is a good opportunity for all EAWOP Constituents that has to be pursued and managed in this time. It is also a challenge because it requires us to develop more structured specialist programmes after graduation as well as supervision, or coaching, procedures. But, this is necessary if we want to develop our position in the Human Resource or consultancy market. It is important that EAWOP Constituents take on this opportunity, apply to set up a S-NAC, and increase their efforts towards the professionalisation of younger WO psychologists.

Finally, if this interview raises any issues or comments please come and talk about them at the roundtable on EuroPsy and the Specialist Certificate at the EAWOP conference in May, 2017 in Dublin.