

## **Didn't You Say Unqualified?**

### **On the job training and qualification processes**

#### **Introduction**

In Switzerland, vocational training is based on a dual apprenticeship system supported and regulated by the State, and by the unions and management. Access to qualification lies in obtaining a diploma, in this case the Federal Certificate of Capacity (CFC), which is awarded at the end of the apprenticeship and nationally recognised. Experience at the workplace, however important it may be, is of little value if unaccompanied by the possession of an official qualification. Socially, the existence of this system has led to a division of the professional world into the unqualified (those without the official diploma) and the qualified.

Following the example of what happened in many countries during the nineties, more particularly within the framework of policies concerned with the struggle against unemployment, many ideas were put forward that sought to consider other forms of apprenticeship, employing such names as “on the job” training, informal training and work-based experience and learning. The essential part of the discussions are henceforth concerned with the measures to be adopted in order to officially recognize and authenticate this work-based experience, which is not covered by the principles of classical training.

Although the following observations certainly follow this line of thinking, they approach the question from a rather different angle. Little work has indeed been carried out in this field taking account of the aspect of gender, yet the consequence of this movement for women is of little importance. By taking account of experience acquired “on the job”, the measures for recognizing and authenticating work-based experience and learning can be seen as so many opportunities to be seized, especially for the least qualified persons. In this connection, it is common knowledge that the distinction between qualified and unqualified largely mirrors the distinction between men and women. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that several pilot investigations in this domain – including the one concerned here – have been initiated by and/or for women.

These procedures, interesting as they are, must not conceal the fact that training acquired “on the job” is not exempt from the division of work according to gender. With poorer professional mobility and occupying little valued

posts, women are not always the best placed to succeed. In certain cases, rather than favouring openness, these procedures may help to reproduce inequalities, or even reinforce them, if they are not accompanied by serious thought on the organisation of work, access to training and mobility.

To illustrate these reflections we shall return here to the presentation of an experiment carried out between 1997 and 2001 that consisted of introducing a system for the recognition of skills acquired by men and women without recognised training in the Swiss watch industry. This experiment was carried out at the request of the women's section of the watch making union with the support of the Federal Bureau for the Equality between Men and Women. The approach adopted differs in several respects from the principles currently adopted in this field.

It did not concern, as it is often the case in the area of recognizing and authenticating work-based experience and learning, a response to an initial wish for training or requalification, but an incentive to encourage awareness of the experience acquired by the various people present on the shop floor. The follow-up of this project has thus been undertaken by the unions and management, and by representatives from vocational and adult training.

It must be emphasized that in the beginning, neither the companies, the staff concerned nor the union itself were very aware of the question of recognizing experience. This is illustrated by this declaration by an employers' representative who considered that "two minutes were amply sufficient for describing the posts occupied by the unqualified staff". The work has therefore largely entailed an attempt to objectify informal training and acquired skills.

There was also the desire to achieve a concrete form of recognition to be applied on a large scale (to all the employees of an enterprise) through these means. Something which proved to be relatively innovative, and which constituted a serious challenge in methodological terms.

Last, but not least in interest, the intention was to arrive in this way at a better understanding of "on the job" training by stressing the gender element. In clarifying the work carried out and the skills entailed, the method developed was intended to permit a better comparison between men and women.

## Methodology

Concerning the methodology, the starting point of the enquiry was immediately situated at the workplace. Based on a definition of skill that considered it to be indivisibly associated with the activity of work (Gilbert and Parlier 1992), it was appropriate to seek it where it was practised i.e. in the workshop. The project development took place, therefore, by direct collaboration with two

enterprises: one in Geneva employing more than 1000 employees, and a medium-sized firm in Neuchâtel with 60 employees. Both are active in the watch making sector, and share a common characteristic of recruiting and employing a high percentage of so-called unqualified staff (nearly 75% of their workforce).

The work was under direct observation in the workshops, and completed by an analysis of the documentation provided by the enterprise (description of the work stations, organisational diagram, pay slips, evaluation files etc.) and by conducting in-depth interviews with those concerned.

## Reference frames of occupations and skills

Based on this, a reference frame of skills and occupations was established. The reference frame for occupation details, for each workshop activity, the various operations carried out by the persons and different machines, tools or instruments employed, whereas the reference frame for skills lists the type of skills required for each operation. Three categories of skills were distinguished, inspired especially by those selected by G. Le Boterf (1994):

- technical and procedural know-how (general theoretical knowledge and expertise relating to the way of carrying out various processes);
- technical and procedural know-how, concerning the real ability to apply theoretical knowledge;
- know-how that takes account of certain personal qualities possessed by the individual (strength, dexterity, etc.) and social qualities (ability to relate to others).

These reference frames were first established for each observed position, and then grouped into a unified ensemble of the main activities that covered the complete work carried out in the workshops. A total of 15 reference frames were prepared, relating to 15 different activities and completely transferable from one enterprise to another.

## Attestation of skills

These documents were used for installing an in-house recognition process. Based on a simplified reference frame for the occupation, an attestation of the skills enables the degree of skill possessed by the operator for each task to be noted. Since the skills inherent in each operation are known, the success of the person in fulfilling them certifies their acquisition. According to the path within the enterprise and the number of activities in which the person has participated, he/she will obtain one or more attestations. The employee and a direct

supervisor always sign the document. Altogether, some 150 persons were engaged in the process, of who about 60 were women.

### Information

A sustained information drive was undertaken. All the employees in the workshops concerned had been informed beforehand in writing and/or orally by the director and the person in charge of the research concerning the aims of the study, the way in which it would be conducted and the anticipated contribution of the persons. This information was completed throughout the study during the hours of attendance of the researchers in the workshops. Each employee had complete freedom of choice whether or not to participate in the interview or the observation.

During the process, those interested authenticated all stages in the elaboration of the reference frames. The completion of the research was accompanied by an individual and/or collective assessment meeting. The supervisory staff and management were involved throughout.

## Internal construction of the qualification

### On the job training

A very large majority of those employed in these enterprises were without previous experience in watch making, or even in the industrial sector. The company requirements for engagement were relatively modest. In 1997, one of the firms stipulated only two recruiting criteria: good eyesight and the ability to read an index card.

The work, on the other hand, required real skill, in that it involved material handling, preparation of parts, series production and control, and setting of CNC machines and electrochemical operations.

Irrespective of the workstation, therefore, these elementary engagement requirements certainly implied an actual internal apprenticeship for men and women. But neither in its structure nor in its form of tuition, did this conform to the principles of formal teaching. It is not completely aleatory, however; it has its own logic and its own key moments. The first of these is the arrival in the enterprise

*“I was the first one to start. All the others came after me. It was Mr. X (the foreman) who taught me everything; he was the one who taught me. Everything I know, it was all from Mr. X”* (dial printer – female)

The foreman plays a leading role in internal training. In most cases, the initial drive comes from him and access to apprenticeship depends largely on the quality of this person, his accessibility and his relationship with colleagues. Quite often, some of the training is also delegated to those with the most experience.

*“I took over a colleague's job. She was the one who showed me how she did it. And since I was already working on the bezels, I could see how she did it. And that's how I learnt. It wasn't my boss who was there to teach me. I had a problem at first, so I used to call my colleague and she explained it to me. And that's how you manage, don't you?”* (dial printer – female)

Lastly, individual initiative is in itself decisive.

*“At first, I used to call the man in charge, and he'd come and change a programme for me, for example. A change on one side – and he'd come and do it. After a time, I started doing it myself. It wasn't easy, but...I thought to myself: if I'm the one who's making the parts, I'm the one who should be doing the setting (of the machine). It was a bit difficult at first, but afterwards it was OK. It was all a question of looking. I saw what to do, and the next time I did it myself.”* (CNC machine setter – male)

Although the arrival in the firm is a decisive moment, the apprenticeship does not end after the first few months. The development of production (e.g. the manufacture of new types of parts) changes in equipment, breakdowns and problems, or even organisational changes are also important events in the training process.

As A. Pain (1990) points out, apprenticeship in this case is an open, indeterminate system and not necessarily organised with a beginning and end. It is also very flexible, and favours a rapid adjustment to changes.

After a period of time spent in the enterprise or in consequence of important changes in production, this apprenticeship may be completed by a more structured internal or external training period. In evolving from an approach that lies at the limits of the informal and moving progressively towards the frontiers of the formal, this training therefore follows an evolution that is opposed in principle to that of an official apprenticeship.

The method employed in this apprenticeship is essentially based on observation, imitation, repetition and a progressive complexity of operations. In the cases observed, this progression involved both the production of increasingly complicated items, and items of greater value (movement from work in steel to that in gold or platinum etc.), and the operation of increasingly sophisticated machines. It is an approach oriented towards practicality and gestures, and extremely individualistic, where persons are seen to advance at their own pace

and according to their capabilities. Knowledge is basically imparted orally, but may also involve actual note taking. It is not uncommon, therefore, to see operators working from a personal notebook in which they record, during their training, the essential movements and data necessary for their work.

The content of the apprenticeship is related to both theoretical and practical skills.

*“Previously, I’d worked on a machine for watch glasses. You just put... You put the glass in the machine and the machine did it all. We put it in and took it out again. It’s the same here, but I change the tools. The cutters – when they break, I go behind the machine, take out the broken ones and put back some new ones, and new drills. Then they showed me how to measure the drills. When the setters have a lot to do, I’m the one who has to look after the setting with tweezers or with the DEA<sup>1</sup>, and I change the tools. And lately I’ve learnt how to change the pallets. I also enter the data into the machine’s computer. The height of the drill, for example. I’ve also done the checking. Today, I started to learn the programme for checking all the day’s parts.*

*Since I hadn’t done any courses on micrometers and all that, it was complicated at first. I didn’t understand anything, because they taught us in maths that 2 plus one makes 3. But here you have to reduce the number to do it. I found it a bit complicated at first. Now it’s all right. It’s just like the DEA controls. There’s the listing. Three pages like that, full up with figures. It was all double Dutch to me. Now I understand it easily. It’s funny when you don’t know something. You look at it and it seems really complicated. I used to look at them and say to myself: “They’re really clever”. It was the same with the drills, I used to see them measuring them behind the machine. “They’re really clever, I used to think, they can do all that but I shall never manage to do any of it”. Now I can do it perfectly. I see it all differently now.” (CNC machine setter –female)*

The skills acquired after some years of practice may be very considerable, both at a technical level and more widely in relation to everything concerning the operation of the enterprise and the social relations.

The opportunities for apprenticeship and advancement are conditioned by internal utility and the availability of posts. Frequently, the departure of an employee may provide an opportunity for one person or other to profit by the occasion. The quality of apprenticeship, nevertheless, remains very variable, and resourcefulness may play a decisive role.

*“When I started, there was somebody. Well, there was a full-timer, but I never knew him. And then another one replaced him, and it was he who taught me. For a week. It was only a week. It takes a month to learn prop*

*erly. I did it in a week, because there was no full-time person. The full-timer was ill and didn’t come back. There was only the replacement and he explained it all to me in a week. Then he said: get on with it.” (a male cleaner of parts)*

Apprenticeship may not necessarily be linear; it may be interrupted, resumed or discontinued in accordance with requirements, and after a few months of apprenticeship there is nothing to prevent a return to a less “qualified” post. A good part of apprenticeship, therefore, is aleatory and contingent upon the existence of opportunities, management attitude and the capacity of the individual to seize an opportunity and show resourcefulness. In other words it is an essentially egalitarian and highly personalized qualification frame. It is, moreover, far from neutral when considered from a gender point of view.

#### **Allocation of skills according to gender**

Observation of the activities carried out and the distribution of tasks serve indeed to reveal how much the introduction and value given to this type of apprenticeship are penetrated by a gender factor. By way of a reminder, I shall limit myself to two examples that to my mind are particularly eloquent.

The first example concerns an activity observed in one of the two enterprises and which consisted of preparing parts (watch making, mechanisms, cars etc) for subsequent chemical treatment (colouring, oxidising etc.). It entails introducing these pieces manually into special tweezers or tongs that are themselves attached to metal supports that will be dipped in the baths. The apparently innocuous way, in which the work is allocated, is particularly interesting.

*“The big pieces are for the men. It’s bigger, it’s heavier and there are different tongs. We’re not strong enough; it knocks you out doing it. The tongs are hard. (...) You have to use the hammer, you have to adjust, the tongs scratch – no, it’s not for us.*

*They think we’re weak. It’s not true, because we carry things as well, but it’s true that we wouldn’t do that all day.” (tong moulder)*

Although the men do indeed handle parts weighing several kilos, it is the women who deal with the smaller ones (fasteners for bracelets, watch parts, knife blades) that need greater delicacy, dexterity and rapidity.

*“With the men there may be really short sets of three or four pieces. But with us there are lots of them: we have sets of 30’000 fasteners, 24,000, 16’000, yes, there are hundreds of thousands.” (tong moulder)*

In addition to the preparation, men fairly often have to carry out adjustment work for the supports, while the women are engaged in checking the pieces.

In this case, therefore, there exists a job differentiation based on criteria of a physical order: strength on the one hand – skill, rapidity, dexterity and delicacy on the other. It is evident, moreover, how much this type of distinction implies a social construct, and how much it is based – for both men and women – on previous in-house and external training. From the viewpoint of task content, however, it could be maintained that men and women are fulfilling tasks of equal value, and of comparable severity. For although the men's work is relatively heavy and tiring, the women are compelled to work in a standing and immobile position and suffer in consequence from frequent backache and neck problems, as well as from eyestrain allied to the smallness of the pieces.

In the case under review, moreover, this task differentiation was accompanied by a considerable salary difference (approaching 15%) to the disadvantage of women. When questioned about this downgrading, management insisted by way of explication, that the men's work necessitates strength. Consequently, with two comparable skills – strength and dexterity – the one associated with men is used as a reference, and women are henceforth evaluated negatively. There is much talk about weakness and fragility, but not about the real skills employed by women. The differentiation of tasks is accompanied therefore – and this is a classic phenomenon – by a failure to take female skills into account, and by a devaluation of the work performed by them.

Furthermore, although in this case women and men are working in the same area and performing comparable tasks, there are other cases where male and female work and working areas have been completely separated. Exclusively feminine and masculine channels of apprenticeship and advancement, associated with different salary scales, thus structure the entire activities of the enterprise.

The second example concerns a situation where men and women are doing the same job, that of polishing<sup>2</sup>. There were two persons, a woman and a man, working side by side. The woman, in accordance with the in-house apprenticeship principle, had taught her colleague everything necessary for carrying out the task, so that both of them were at the same work-based qualification level. Yet, in this most flagrant example of inequality, despite displaying greater skill, the woman received a salary that was more than 20% lower than that of the man. The explanation offered for this anomaly is only too familiar: the woman's salary was of a "secondary" nature, whereas that of the man constituted the principal income for his family. The woman's work was evaluated according to external criteria, without reference to the skills involved.

These two examples suffice to illustrate the qualification or (in this case) disqualification process at work. For women, the reference is no longer to

skills acquired in the enterprise, but to their role within a patriarchal family model that is being reinforced and perpetuated. This results in an under-evaluation, or even ignorance, of the skills employed and the apprenticeship needed for their acquisition. The work does not have the same value, is less recognised and less qualified. In the first example, the dexterity and finesse are not really "skills", and in the second, this woman, who could have claimed a supervisory post, finds herself situated in terms of salary below her colleague. In both cases, the situation is a disqualifying one for women.

## Assessment of reference frame and attestation

### Visibility of the work-based skills and awareness of the participants

The systematic description of the activities and skills has had an undoubted effect on the visibility and awareness of work-based know-how and existing potential.

The in-depth analysis, for example, of an operation considered to be particularly simple and banal, such as the drilling of millimetre sized holes in a piece of precious metal, enables the very diverse knowledge employed to be demonstrated; such as highly specific theoretical know-how (dimensioning system, knowledge of the metals etc.), technical and procedural know-how (command of basic computer skills for checking, and procedures to be followed for each type of part etc.), but also such personal qualities as attention, precision and rapidity.

This type of approach is particularly valuable for certain undervalued and traditionally female tasks, such as checking. These require constant attention and work with a binocular magnifier, thus demanding an important physical (ocular) contribution. They also suppose a mastery of quality criteria and a definite assumption of responsibility, in that this constitutes the last phase before delivery of the parts to the client. These are skills that can be strategic in the types of management that are highly oriented towards quality and customer satisfaction.

More widely, after comparison with the official professional reference frames, it became apparent that several persons had acquired a level of skill equivalent to that required by the CFC. This had never previously been noticed by the enterprise or by the employees. In other cases, the work-based skills were important, but were not according to the criteria employed in defining the official trade – either because they were too disparate to constitute a recognized trade, or because practice was in advance of the official definition. In all

these scenarios, the process introduced has really enabled some totally ignored aspects of in-house apprenticeship to come forward.

Relating skills to salary has confirmed, moreover, that generally speaking this apprenticeship has not been duly recognised. Operatives working on several machines and exercising many control techniques remain considered as unqualified personnel with the same salary as a beginner. In addition, the presence of a document attesting the work carried out, has made it possible to conduct systematic comparisons between men and women, and has made the inequalities of salaries for identical posts even more apparent.

These various records based on a direct observation of the work have resulted in a real awareness on the part of both employers and workers. The individual interviews carried out at the end of the research aroused such reactions as: "I didn't know I was doing all that", or "at last I know where I am. I usually have the impression of not knowing what I really know". The process has therefore proved to be a means for the workers to find themselves, and to become aware of their own situation and value. In terms of appreciation, such reactions as the following can be added: "It's really the first time they've shown any interest in us," which conveys the feeling of being habitually isolated from these processes. The study has enabled an awareness on the part of the employers of the importance of skills displayed, especially for the human resources management of the larger enterprise where direct contact with the workshop is not a daily occurrence. But it has also provided the opportunity for discovering differences between men and women that had previously not been systematically recorded, or that had even been totally ignored.

### **Some specific measures**

Several positive measures have since been introduced. The whole wages policy of the Geneva enterprise has been reviewed. Women's salaries have been progressively adjusted to those of men, and in the case of Neuchâtel the most glaring cases of inequality have been addressed.

As far as official recognition is concerned, this experiment has led to an extensive discussion between employers and unions concerning the judiciousness of generalising the principle to the whole of the industry. This debate finally led to the introduction of a concrete measure within the collective agreement. Enterprises in every branch of watch making are henceforth required to testify to training followed and work-based experience by means of a standard document; an attestation of training to accompany the worker throughout his/her career and complement the attestation of employment. The recorded information is more summary than that recorded within the experimental framework. It comprises the activities carried out and the professional knowledge acquired, but the detail concerning the level of mastery has been abandoned.

The wide scale implementation of it, on the other hand, is greatly facilitated and very rapid.

For people whose level of skill was particularly high, information initiatives were undertaken in both firms to make known the official procedures for the authentication of the work-based experience and learning, and to encourage employers and employees to participate in it. As an experiment, a first attempt was made with a recognised job, that of polisher. As a result, more than twenty persons, men and women, have undergone such a procedure since 2001, the date when the scheme was launched. After 3 months, a woman was the first to receive her diploma. The authentication of her experience had sufficed for obtaining the qualification without any complementary training being required. In this case, the accreditation was carried out on the basis of a complete personal assessment of the work-based professional and private skills, complemented by an interview at the workplace conducted by a professional expert. The areas that are considered to be mastered, are afterwards authenticated by experts, and representatives of workers, employers and instructors. The other areas are subjected to additional training for approval by an examination. The whole procedure is under supervision by the State, the employers and the unions.

### **Limitations**

From many points of view, the result of the experiment can be seen as positive. There were some limitations, however, especially in gender terms.

The recognition process employed certainly enables levels of identical skills to be detected, and, in this sense, for these inequalities to be corrected – but without necessarily removing all of them.

The Geneva enterprise, for example, offers its unqualified employees two avenues of advancement. One consists of moving, after attending some extra courses, from the post of workshop employee to that of CNC machine-setter, accompanied by an increase in wages. The other provides access to checking, packaging, workshop secretariat or flow management, but without necessarily a change in remuneration. It was to be observed that all the machine setters were men, and that women did all the checking and packaging etc. The skills are indeed different, but are easily shown to be equivalent. There was, nevertheless, very considerable opposition to salary corrections at that level. Although recognition may reveal a factual situation, it does not necessarily, of its own accord, disturb a scale of values.

Similarly, official accreditation is not without its ambiguities. Bridging between official diplomas and in-house recognition reveals divergences in content between in-house and external training. The official structure of trades does not necessarily conform to the internal practice of enterprises. This means

that a person who enjoys wide experience may easily be excluded from any possibility of accreditation if the reference frames remain purely external. Access to accreditation may also reproduce, or even reinforce, gender inequalities if the elements valued in formal apprenticeship are the same as those that are mostly acquired by men in the enterprise. Thus, traditionally very feminine tasks of checking and preparing parts are not among the main tasks required by the official apprenticeships. Women are thus excluded from, or have very limited access to the authentication process. In this case, therefore, accreditation continues to reproduce the internal differences, or even to accentuate them. Men, effectively, acquire an official recognition of their apprenticeship and skills, which serves to further depreciate the work of women.

Although the introduction of such an approach has the advantage of throwing light on certain situations, it is not necessarily sufficient to challenge a valuation system of work and organisation that controls professional practices. It seems henceforth inevitable to associate it with a consideration of the questions relating to the organisation of work (decompartmentalizing of female and male occupations and/or identical evaluation of the two paths). Without this, there is a high risk of finally perpetuating and confirming gender as the sole deciding factor.

## For wider consideration

### A case among others...

The neglect of feminine skills noted here in the watchmaking profession does not apply solely to this sector. The same reasoning is to be found in many other fields, whether in the industrial or service areas. It suffices to think of those social skills (listening, *savoir-faire*, interactivity etc.) that are so often naturally employed when practised by women, such as in medico-social work or in sales promotion. And this is not – as our example might lead us to suppose – just a characteristic of a tayloristic organisation in the process of disappearing. “Flexibility”, a concept so central in the new forms of work organisation, is now in the process of becoming one of the essentially feminine skills, just as patience and resistance to monotony had for so long been in the tayloristic models. As can be seen in the second example, “coeducation”, often considered as a means for rectifying these differences, has not in fact prevented their reproduction. The same methods of attributing or underestimating skills therefore impregnate the fields of activity and the forms of organisation.

### A certain opening

In noting this, it is only to be hoped that attempts at the objectification and recognition of skill, such as the present one, will be carried out on a wider scale. These still remain only too rare, and those that exist – especially the assessment approaches – are frequently carried out far from their professional context and therefore have a limited impact on the enterprises. Starting out, however, from the place of work, where quality of performance is assessed within the context of its implementation. An awareness is encouraged that goes beyond the level of the individual person. The link systematically established between a woman's work and her domestic role is severed, and permits a strictly professional reference to be established, which is identical for both men and women.

From then on, increasing the flexibility of possible training and career paths, removing the boundaries between initial and further training, and accenting practical aspects will undoubtedly open up new training possibilities, especially for those who have previously had no access to the more classical avenues. A whole and particularly stimulating field of thought and action has thus been opened for adult education, whether in the manner of taking account of skills or of redefining the channels of training, their content and methods of teaching.

### A new challenge for the education of adults and for women

For all that, these openings must not deadlock the challenge with which women and teachers are confronted. As we know only too well, investment in a new field by women is often accompanied by a reconstruction of the differences between the sexes at another level. The risk is present here as well. It is not certain, as we said, that the systems of recognition and authentication would not finally be to the advantage of men, because of the internal progress in relation to the official professions, or simply because of the different assessment of acquired skills. It is a question of not losing sight of how the construction of the qualification does not depend solely upon the objectification of the skills by the investigator nor the awareness that the women may have of it, but on a process of social redefinition, or, as P. Naville would say, on “the social appreciation of the differential value of work”. (Naville 1963, p.243). Which means that the exposure of skills is certainly a fundamental step, but that it loses a part of its sense if the skills are not the object of a real socially negotiated recognition.

The challenge is important on at least two levels. First of all, within the same profession, to recognize “on the job” apprenticeship is to stress what is essentially and directly useful and operational for the enterprise. To a certain extent, therefore, skill should only be considered with reference to its particu-

lar and instrumental aspect. What is the contribution of recognition and authentication of work-based experience and learning to the education process in the broad sense? Should a return to a practical approach be seen rather as an abandonment of this? Yet a consideration of this subject would seem even more pertinent in that the introduction of these procedures may appear paradoxical in light of the present observable tendencies towards an ever longer extension of schooling, and changes in the content of apprenticeships that very frequently direct it towards the acquisition of general knowledge. What status can be claimed henceforth by a person whose skills have been evaluated in terms of practical efficiency? It is essential that the training received in this way shall be considered as equivalent to others, otherwise it will only reproduce – in other guises – the initial differences between the qualified and unqualified, and between men and women. And not solely on a national scale, but for those who work with them. Reactions on the part of qualified workers, among the women as well, were often very heated. It was seen, among other things, as a threat of seeing one's own training devalued, and of seeing oneself having to accept a too efficient competition and a different professional culture. A highly concerted persuasion effort was necessary, but also the submission of proof that the training provided was equivalent to that acquired in the traditional way. Recognition within the profession of this equivalence of skills does not therefore come of its own accord.

But, between professions, the question is more complicated. The specifying of skills is inadequate for the recognition and equality of value between different activities. We came across this problem when it concerned a comparison between the work entailed in checking and that of managing the workflow and adjustment of the machine. Others have also encountered it in the public services in connection with the wage equality of a nurse and a gardener (Chicha 1997). As long as this type of resistance persists, the true recognition of the skills of women will not be achieved.

The recording and revealing of skills leads inevitably to the question of how to define training, professional area, status and the prestige attached to the various activities. A vast programme that women are far from being able to fulfil alone. This all depends, among other things, on the connections they are able to bring to bear in this direction within enterprises, externally, in trade unions, professional circles and those devoted to education. In light of the relative strengths characterising these spheres, the game is far from being won. But that does not remove the necessity for entering the game.

(Translated by Ronald Wilkens)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> DEA: totally automated control of parts.

<sup>2</sup> Polishing is a vital operation in the finishing of watch components. It enables the removal of scratches, defects and other anomalies arising from the previous machining of the parts.