

Master's programme in expert by expertise at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences

In 2023, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences started a two-year Master's programme in experiential expertise. The focus of this programme is on making room for experience expertise in organisations and in society. What does this mean, for example, for vision or HR policy? What place do experts by experience have in an organisation?

A prerequisite for starting the study is that students have already obtained a Bachelor's degree in a human-oriented profession, have developed experience expertise (e.g. in a specialisation track in Bachelor social work or in post-HBO specialisation). Work experience is a plus.

The training is structured in 3 learning lines: 1. Knowledge and guiding concepts, 2. Participatory Action Research and 3. Personal and Professional Development, in accordance with the national quality system Experiential Expertise in the Netherlands. That quality system describes a generic module, in which the knowledge base was established and translated into curricula for training courses in expertise by experience. See: <https://vved.org/kve/> (association of experts by experience).

In the training component 'participatory action research', the student searches in his own organisation what can be changed in order to work with experts by experience in a qualitative way. This research starts with an exploratory part, in which the stakeholders in the organisation are questioned. The aim is to find out what the position of experts by experience is, what opportunities and obstacles exist. They then work on one dilemma with the aim of formulating policy recommendations around this theme.

In the Personal and Professional Development training component, the focus is also on the added value and place of experts by experience in the organisation on working on inclusion and emancipation with the help of experts by experience and on free space for those staff members. As an expert by experience, what do I want to bring about in the organisation from my sensitivity to treatment and stigmatisation? Experience knowledge is rooted in experiences of disruption and stigmatisation. A social worker with experience knowledge will look at situations differently and also pay attention to perception and treatment. How can I meaningfully bring my experience expertise into my work? How can I support other experts by experience and ensure equal relationships? The lecturer invites students to tell about their own practice. That story reflects a lot about their own perceptions and those of the organisation. Exchanges take place among themselves: in individual conversations and also in thematic interventions, linking back to literature, the knowledge base and the core task. Supporting colleagues is also a core task of a master of experiential expertise. This often entails role confusion. Questions like: Should I take care of my colleague then? Are we friends if we share personal stories or do we remain professional? As a bridge figure, it is often necessary to also bring in your own story. But that often remains a barrier. Experts by experience also initially want to be seen as professionals in the work setting and are often afraid of the prejudice of colleagues if they dare to show themselves. It remains vulnerable knowledge, which people want to be assessed as full knowledge.

Many teachers in the course are experience experts themselves. Additional experts by experience are also requested as guest lecturers or co-trainers. What do these experience experts need in terms of support to work qualitatively in higher education? Tailor-made support is always sought in training. The diversity among the experts by experience is great and each has a specific need for support. Payment is also tailored: for some, tenure works, others prefer vouchers as an extra. For experts by experience, it remains a difficult step to take final responsibility themselves. They themselves often prefer to stay in the co-teacher, co-trainer or co-researcher role. But organisationally, they are also not challenged enough to do so.

Concrete activities require thinking about the purpose of the lesson. What is the added value of experiential knowledge in this training component? Upon completion, debriefing and evaluation of cooperation is also important. Intervision is provided four times a year for teachers. Questions such as: was I able to maintain sufficient distance? Did I feel sufficiently supported? Are then addressed. There is a great need to exchange with colleagues and get feedback from others. This happens mostly informally now, but would be best structured and anchored in training, facilitated by the organisation. But that, of course, costs time and money. Role models in training are also important. Those are role models for others. At the University of Applied Sciences, there is also an advisor on Experience Expertise for the Welfare and Health training domain (for education and research). She looks at how the organisation can give experience knowledge and experience expertise a firmer place

The Bachelor programme Expert by Experience in social work education

In the social work programme, an optional subject is offered for students with experiential knowledge. The aim is for students to learn how to use their own experiential knowledge in their work, for the benefit of the client. They analyse what they themselves have experienced and what knowledge it contains. They figure out how to use this knowledge from experience in concrete client situations. This is a minor of the programme (a specialisation programme). An internship of 2 days a week for one semester is linked to it. Students investigate how they can use knowledge of experience in support of clients/colleagues? How can they use their experiential knowledge to counter stigmatisation and promote emancipation? Students learn through knowledge development and reflection. This is why a lot of intervision is provided flanking the internship. Questions such as: What motivation lies behind getting started with this? How can you keep a sufficient distance? How do you notice that the input of knowledge from experience works, adds something?

Successful completion of this optional module leads to a certificate with the diploma.